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THE HILLS HAVE EYES

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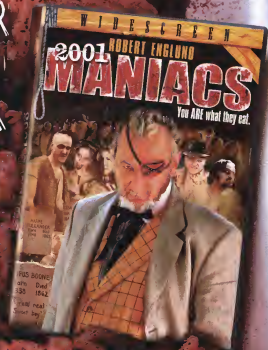
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THE EVIL THAT MEN REDO

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*It seems any and every fright flick of note is getting a major studio makeover. Director Alexandre Aja talks about his highly anticipated return to Wes Craven's hillbilly horror classic *The Hills Have Eyes*. Plus: interviews with Craven, effects master Greg Nicotero, upcoming remakes and more!*
by John W. Bowen, Monica S. Kuebler, Dave Alexander, Tom Murray and Jovanka Vuckovic

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by Matthew Bradford

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Note From Underground



When it comes to telling a story, there are two schools of thought: one says that it is the storyteller that makes the story, while the other maintains that the power of a strong tale lies not with the teller, but with the tale itself. In other words, a good story is a good story, no matter who tells it. This was particularly significant during the 1900s, in cinema's infancy, a time when literary milestones like *The Golden*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *Dracula* were being told and retold again. But each adaptation was not as remarkable as the next.

While it's a romantic notion to suggest that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or *The Modern Prometheus* is so powerful a story that it could survive retelling by anyone who's competent with a camera, it simply is not true. *Frankenstein* has been told so many times in genre cinema that we've lost count, and though the fundamental archetypes are usually present, most adaptations fail to move us the way Thomas Edison or James Whale once did. It is province of the filmmaker to dictate whether *Frankenstein* becomes *Flesh for Frankenstein*, *The Ghost of Frankenstein*, *Blackenstein*, or even *Fuckenstein* (!).

Of course, there is a distinction between a retelling and a remake. The remake, which long predates the current Hollywood trend, is not a retelling of literary source material, but a re-envisioning of a film that already exists. We tend to be more forgiving of a new take on Stoker's *Dracula* than we would be of, say, remaking *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, *Suspria* or *The Evil Dead*. Those films are products of their time, like catching lightning in a bottle, and are therefore considered unchangeable in the genre. What would *Suspria* be without Argento's trademark lurid colours and Goblin's score? Or *Evil Dead* without Raimi's innovative camera work and Bruce Campbell as Ash?

It's natural that we should be skeptical of remakes; genre fans are extremely loyal when it comes to the classics. We feel an ownership of them because, for many of us, these films helped form the basis of who we are. The degeneration of cornerstones like *House On Haunted Hill*, *Psycho* and *The Fog* are precisely the reason why most horror fans bristle at the idea of remakes. We're tired of seeing the films we love perverted by people who have no respect for horror (read: Hollywood). But in that overzealous crusade to protect what we hold dear, we sometimes lose sight of the fact that remakes can, in fact, be valuable.

Contrary to popular thought, a remake can greatly improve upon a premise and become something more majestic than its predecessor. Case in point: my personal favourite horror film of all time is John Carpenter's *The Thing*, and lo and behold... it's a remake.

I have great reverence for Carpenter's masterwork because it was instrumental to my development as a horror fan. Its isolated atmosphere of suffocating dread, spectacular effects courtesy of Rob Bottin (who himself inspired a generation of effects artists), and Ennio Morricone's brooding and dignified score exist cohesively to elicit paranoia and legitimate fear. It just plain works. And I'd be hard-pressed to find an erudite genre fan that doesn't agree with me.

The Thing left a permanent wrinkle in the psyches of an entire generation of moviegoers and also inspired them to seek out the original, *The Thing From Another World*, thereby prompting them to discover the genre further. Among the current pantheon of mescusable, irresponsible remakes, there are a few that make up for the rest: *The Fly*, *The Blob*, and both retellings of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* come to mind and, most recently, Alexandre Aja's take on Wes Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes*, this issue's cover story.

It's hard to gauge whether Aja actually improved upon the original because his film lacks the social commentary Craven's has (itself a product of its time), but in the end it's obvious that Aja did right by Craven. We wouldn't be putting his movie on our cover if we felt he didn't. *The Hills Have Eyes* 2006 is relentless, ultra-violent, and stands its ground. With any luck, it too will inspire a new generation of filmmakers to dig deep into the genre's bloody back catalogue. And for that, we should be grateful.

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RUE MORGUE #54 is dedicated to Gavin Alexander's memory.

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DESIGN BY GARY PULLIN

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JV

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Post Mortem

QUESTIONS • COMMENTS • CRITICISM

ROD: I just wanted to write and tell you how much I've enjoyed what you've created over the past eight(+) years. I've been on board with the magazine since *RM#3*, and have always been impressed with every aspect of it. What I have been even more impressed with though, has been you as a person. Since first meeting you in Horrorfind three or four years ago you have always approached and spoken to me whenever we've crossed paths, you've introduced me to others, and brought me into conversations if you've seen me standing off on my own, and you've invited me and taken time out of your busy schedule to visit on the couple of occasions that I dropped by the old office. So I wanted to say thanks for all of that, and tell you how much I've appreciated it. I wish you the best of luck with your new goals and challenges, and look forward to seeing what you come up with next.

Brian Hatchings – Ottawa, Ontario

JOVANKA: This is Chris Haberman from *Fargo*. Just wanted to say I saw the latest issue – CONGRATS and THANKS! The "thanks" is for the time you spent with me a few years ago when I was starting out, sending you inquiries all the time. I couldn't just drop you a line without expressing gratitude for some of the education you imparted to me back in the day. *Rue Morgue* undoubtedly has a fantastic future ahead of it with such a patient and selfless person like yourself behind the wheel.

Chris Haberman – Louisville, Kentucky

NOT THAT I WAS CONCERNED about the fate of *Rue Morgue*, but after reading your interview on *Bloody-Disgusting.com*, I was reassured that you are indeed the right person to helm the mag. I wish you the best of luck, and admire you for your impressive accomplishments, Jovanka!

Brian – Toronto, Ontario

CONGRATS on your new post as Editor-In-Chief. I can't tell you how happy it makes me to see a woman at the reigns of such a powerful genre publication as *Rue Morgue*. You will rule!

Aine Leicht – Los Angeles, California

YOUR PIECE on the popularity of children's horror literature (*RM#53*) was fantastic. Fans of horror are well aware of the fact that childhood is in itself the stuff of nightmares, and the books that you listed certainly embody the terror of growing up. Most of us found horror as a means of escape from

the pain of adolescence. I can't think of any time in my life that was more creepy than my junior high years, and reading Poe and Bradbury for English class provided me with a refuge. As an adult and a teacher, I understand the important role that these books play in the lives of teenagers, if only to provide them with a release from their anxiety and to let them know that they are not alone. That's one of the reasons why I am still such a fanatic of the horror genre – both literature and film, at 35.

Spencer M. Ellis – Staten Island, New York

I WANTED TO THANK YOU for featuring Dave Davies' book *The Monster Engine* in the last issue. The pictures within and the idea of the book captured my interest so much that I just had to have a copy. Also, *Rue Morgue* fans online have been praising the Roger Corman cover by Gary Piller and with damned good reason, that boy can draw! As a fan of Vincent Price, Corman and AIP pictures, it was in a state of pure bliss that I had down my \$7.95 for the issue.

Ed "Dracenstein" Luskey – Oakville, Ontario

I JUST WANTED TO thank you for the awesome article you wrote this month on my book *The Monster Engine*. It is one of the best articles I've read to date. The design of the pages was top notch as well. In any event, I just wanted to let you know how much I appreciated it. I'm off to the store to grab all the issues off the rack.

Dave DeVries – West Orange, New Jersey

THANKS for sending me copies of *Rue Morgue*. I was very pleased with the way the interview turned out. I also got a big buzz out of appearing in a magazine alongside Roger Corman and Clive Barker! I loved the interview and love the mag too. In fact, I enjoyed it so much, I subscribed!

Darren Shan – Limerick, Ireland

I GOTTA DISAGREE with Rod Gudino's review of *Hostel* in *RM#53*. I was really glad that Eli Roth decided not to make the unfortunate backpackers either assholes or morons. The heavy pleasure setup that the movie begins with does take a while, but I thought that it was a fun way to start a horror pic. To me, it actually seemed to foreshadow things to come. As much pleasure as these guys were seeking, that's how much pain was awaiting them. I guess the movie could have been more suspenseful, and it does deliver the goods mainly to the

boob and buzz saw-loving early-teen male crowd. Still, it comes off as fun and sometimes surprising, with a glimpse at the pitch-black side of human nature that stays with you long after the power drills and chomaxes have gone silent. This movie is no *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, but it did indeed leave me with a scar that I'll enjoy for some time.

Josh Austin – Newnan, Georgia

THANK YOU so much for including me in your latest Horror Spotlight 2006. What a thrill it is to be the US entry! I'm also extremely excited to be quoted as my first magazine. You all were so generous to view my rough cut. Your support and validation of my film means a great deal to me, truly.

Scott Glosserman – Los Angeles, California

AT LAST, your magazines, they've arrived. Just one small infinitesimal detail that should be straightened out once and for all. That is, assuming that we've drawn everything we might know about animation exclusively from the example of Jan [Svankmajer]. Our producer used this opportunity to our greatest chagrin by having us endorse Jan's work to an American audience despite the fact that this is entirely false insofar as we first discovered the work of Walerian Borowczyk and Jan Lenica in the late '60s, and then Ladislav Starewicz in the early '70s, as well as those other Czechs Trnka, Zeman, Pajur and Tyrlina. Jan we only discovered in 1983, when we made the documentary on him with this same producer. Borowczyk's *Gato L'Isle d'Amour* has been the most influential film in our life apart from *Un Chien Andalou*.

The Quays – somewhere in Great Britain

Correction: Last issue we identified *Zombie Nightmare* as a Roger Corman film when, in fact it was made after Corman departed New World Pictures. Also, the *Fear Street* series is written by R. L. Stine. Special thanks to Robert Corino for his contribution to the Terror By Tobs article in *RM#53*. *Rue Morgue* regrets the errors and omissions.



We encourage readers to send their comments via mail or email. Letters may be edited for length and/or content. Please send all correspondence to:

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Dreadlines

News Highlights



Horror Happenings

Genre vets collaborate for *Trapped Ashes* horror anthology

Well-known horror veterans have teamed up for a new horror anthology called *Trapped Ashes*, which recently wrapped in Japan. Directors involved include Sean Cunningham (*Friday the 13th*), Ken Russell (*The Devils*, *Lair of the White Worm*), Academy Award-winning visual effects designer and first-time director John Gaeta (*The Matrix* trilogy), as well as elusive cult icon Monte Hellman, who returns to the director's chair after nearly two decades away. Joe Dante (*Piranha*, *The Howling*, *Gremlins*), who recently returned to the anthology format with the *Masters of Horror* episode *Homecoming*, provides the framing device for the film. (Tobe Hooper was originally attached but had to drop out.)

"The idea is that several hapless souls are sent tickets for a special VIP tour of the 'Ultra Studios' backlog, which looks suspiciously like another familiar studio location," Dante explains about his wraparound story for *Trapped Ashes*. "And when they show up, their creepy tour guide, played by Henry Gibson, takes them into the abandoned haunted house set used by a notorious director for his last and scariest movie. Only they can't get out and are forced to spend the night telling their stories."

Most notable is the return of Hellman, who directs the first story, Stanley's Girlfriend (featuring genre legend John Saxon). It centers on a struggling screenwriter in 1950s Hollywood whose friendship with a young Stanley Kubrick is strained by the appearance of Nina, a mysterious actress whose love comes with a terrible price.

Though best known for acclaimed cult classics like *Two-Lane Blacktop* and *Cockfighter*, Hellman's wildly varied career ranges from directing the Roger Corman quickie *Beast From Haunted Cave*, to contributing (often



Jayce Bartok in Ken Russell's *Trapped Ashes* segment *The Girl With The Golden Breasts*.

uncredited) footage to films like *The Terror*, *The Big Red One* and *A Fistful of Dollars*, and executive producing *Reservoir Dogs*.

"[*Trapped Ashes* writer/producer] Dennis Bartok is one of my best friends," Hellman explains. "I was one of the first to read the script, loved it, and became involved almost from the start."

Bartok, formerly the head of film programming for the American Cinematheque in L.A., says that *Trapped Ashes* was inspired by the anthology films of Amicus studios (the original *Tales From The Crypt*, *The House That Dropped Blood*) and, curiously, supernatural Japanese cinema.

"*Kwaidan* and *Spirits of the Dead* were definitely in the back of my mind when I was writing the script for *Trapped Ashes*," Bartok recalls. "[It's] really in that tradition of art house horror, a mixture of the surreal, the grotesque and terrifying, and the erotic."

Cunningham's entry, *Jihaku*, is about an evil sect; Russell's *The Girl With Golden*

Breasts is a tale of augmentation gone awry; and lastly, Gaeta's *My Twin*, *The Worm* focuses on evil siblings.

Not surprisingly, the nature of the Japanese/American production presented several hurdles for the filmmakers.

"I had five days – three in Vancouver and two in Hollywood – where the movie is supposedly set," says Dante. "All the episodes were shot before I did my stuff, except for Sean's, which moved everyone to Japan."

For Hellman, whose last film was *Silent Night, Deadly Night 3*, the biggest challenge of his return was the format itself.

"I didn't find the shorter form as limiting as trying to fit a short piece into a larger whole," he says. "I'm used to having control, and it was strange to have so many elements outside my playing field."

The filmmakers hope to release *Trapped Ashes* simultaneously in North America and Japan later this year.

Joseph O'Brien

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Archetype Films leads horror production boom in Hamilton, Ontario

Dreadlines

"I don't know if you've ever been to Hamilton, but locations are everywhere," says Suk-Min (Daniel) Lee, a makeup and prosthetics artist whose career is booming thanks to the Ontario city. "It's just the perfect place for shooting horror movies."

Located 45 minutes southwest of Toronto and best known for its steel mills and football team, Hamilton is not the first place one would immediately expect a horror movie boom to take place. But Toronto-based Archetype Films has decided to shoot no less than a dozen horror movies in the city. Filming got underway in October and by press time production on four of those movies will have wrapped, with the other eight roughly \$1.5-million budget films tentatively scheduled to be completed by the end of 2006.

The first title, set for straight-to-DVD release this summer, is *Heartstopper*. The film stars genre legend Robert Englund as a demon-possessed serial killer who returns from the grave. It was directed by Bob Koehn, who's worked in the special effects department on films like *Alien*, *Candyman*, *Dog Soldiers*, and several of the *Hellraiser* installments.

The rest of the dozen planned movies will also feature a well-known genre actor. Edward (The Crow; Wicked Prayer) Furlong stars in the second film, *Warriors of Terra*, about animal activists breaking into a testing lab, where they become prey for a mutant girl. Ron (Hellboy) Perlman stars in the third entry, *Five Girls*, which features a Catholic school terrorized by a demon; and the fourth installment, *The Last Sect*, has David (Kill Bill) Carradine as the grandson of Van Helsing, who's hunting down vam-



Heartstopper: Archetype Films' first feature is set for DVD release this summer.

pires that use an online dating service to lure victims.

"I love the tenderloin part of this town," Carradine notes of the less-than-posh Hamilton location. "I like that kind of place, where the bakers, hookers, strippers and people like that hang out."

Hamilton has had a long history as a blue-collar manufacturing city, but in recent years many of its factories have closed down. Those buildings are now finding new life as movie sets ("The art department practically doesn't have to do anything," says Lee of their aesthetic). Archetype's parent company, PeaceArch Entertainment Group Inc., had shot films in Hamilton in the past, and this time the plan to shoot a series of low-budget horror films back to back in

the city will allow the filmmakers to get more bang for their buck.

"Things become economically more feasible when we start dealing in volume," points out Erin Berry, one of the line producers on the films, adding "It's a friendlier place to shoot."

Like all towns outside of the Greater Toronto Area, Hamilton offers a higher tax credit than Toronto, plus shooting permits and location rentals are cheaper and easier to obtain. Being just down the road from Toronto also allows Archetype to take advantage of Hollywood North's community of experienced film crews. Many of the crew members, including Lee, have signed on for all twelve films.

While scripts for the next eight films have yet to be finalized, Berry says the company hopes to tread a lot of horror ground.

"We're planning on covering [multiple subgenres]," he notes, adding that he hopes one of the company's next films will see the streets of Hamilton alive with the undead.

Lindsay Koeteman





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Dreadlines

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www.newsfromthedeadzone.com

Recently launched and maintained by Stephen King expert Ben Vincent (*The Road to Dark Tower*), **NRDZ** aspires to be the one-stop fright shop for all things King. Drop by for up-to-date publishing news and public appearance dates, as well as links to articles and essays about the master of macabre.

www.johnnyeckmuseum.com

Born with only half a body, Johnny Eck didn't let that prevent him from living an incredible life — one that's carefully memorialized on this site. From his role in *Dr. Brown's Freaks* to his extensive touring, writing, photography and more, the Johnny Eck museum is a must-visit online oddity.

www.scannaphor.com/cabernet/vicfrances1.htm

If your tastes tend towards the vampiric, the gothic artwork of Victoria Frances is the stuff of your darkest dreams. Collecting 28 of the artist's paintings, this gallery is a showcase of the subtle, sensual, spooky and spellbinding.

oldhorror.blogspot.com

Haunted by vague memories of Halloween past? Suffer no more! This blog takes you down memory lane with their growing collection of All Hallows Eve images from the turn of the century through to the 1970s. Trick or treat!

www.marioween.tk

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Compiled by Monica S. Kuebler
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Podcasting poised to be the newest trend in horror fiction

Horror publishing may be entering a digital revolution, one strangely spearheaded by none other than the Knights Templar. Starting January 31st, Joseph Nassise's novel *Heretic: The Templar Chronicles* — which features the ancient order — will take advantage of the latest trend in book promotion: podcasting. Designed to reach readers who might not ordinarily give a horror novel a try, this podcast marks the first time that an entire novel put out by a major publishing house will be available in the format free of charge.

This second novel for Nassise, who's also a past president of the Horror Writer's Association, speculates on how the Knights Templar might operate today, had they survived.

"*Heretic* is a cross-genre novel; it has elements of horror, dark fantasy, military action, religious thriller, etc.," Nassise tells *Rue Morgue*.

The work will podcast in fifteen to twenty-minute audio episodes, over a period of 30 weeks via The Podcast Network (thepodcastnetwork.com), a central hub for Internet audio and video feeds that. The segments will also be available at the novel's official website, thetemplarchronicles.com, and on iTunes. Each week's episode comes formatted for download to iPods, portable mp3 players, or directly to a computer — either manually or automatically by subscribing to the podcast feed.

"I'd been listening to various technology-related podcasts for several months and was surprised that so few authors and publishers had taken advantage of this growing medium to introduce their work to potential readers," says Nassise of his interest in the technology.

In addition to the weekly podcast, the book's official website and The Horror

Channel (the project's corporate sponsor) will host a discussion forum, background information on the series, character dossiers, several interactive chats, a look inside the protagonist's personal diary, contests, and more.

While the idea of podcasting a novel in its entirety is relatively new, other horror

authors are using the technology to promote their works: Douglas Clegg (*The Machinery of Night, Afterlife*) is podcasting excerpts from his new series *Vampyricon*, and Pod of Horror (co-founded by authors Mark Justice and David T. Wilbanks, and sponsored by horrorreader.com) distinguishes itself as a horror lit radio show featuring publishing and convention news, book recommendations, as well as interviews with popular genre authors and editors.

Podcasting, however, is not the only new technology being used to market horror novels. Recently genre giant Stephen King made exclusive supplemental content available to fans via their cell phones in order to promote his latest novel *Cell*.

Even though the mainstream publishing world has only just begun to embrace these new formats, Nassise himself sees the podcast in particular playing a key role in the future of horror literature.

"If publishers get behind the effort I think podcasting can become an important tool in marketing a writer's latest works," he explains. "Some publishers, like Simon & Schuster, Penguin, and Holtzbrinck, are using podcasts to provide short excerpts and author interviews to readers already. Podcasting entire works is only a short step from there."

Brett Alexander Savory
and Monica S. Kuebler



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Weird Stats Morbid Facts

- + According to the Food and Drug Administration, a 700-gram jar of peanut butter can legally contain up to 210 insect fragments and seven rodent hairs.
- + The unearthing of King Tut's tomb in the 1920s not only launched the whole filmic mummy craze of the period, but also served as the origin for the modern belief in a "mummy's curse."
- + *Night of the Living Dead* was the first feature film to be made in Pittsburgh by a local production company.
- + Before Vlad the Impaler became infamous as a tyrannical ruler, he had studied to become a man of the cloth.
- + Steven Spielberg was only 21-years-old when he co-directed the pilot episode of Rod Serling's *Night Gallery*.
- + The bodies of recently deceased women were used to test the earliest prototypes of the guillotine in France.
- + In 1996 MTV presented Godzilla, the monster, with a lifetime achievement award on their annual movie awards show. The legendary Japanese icon also has a star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame.
- + Serial killers are, in fact, much less common in Third World countries than in industrialized nations.
- + Because of his predilections for both gambling and drinking, Edgar Allan Poe never completed university.
- + The Catacombs beneath Paris are believed to permanently inter an excess of three million corpses.
- + For the equivalent of a half-day's shooting budget, actress Karen Black's manager was able to convince director H.G. Lewis and associates to destroy the nude scene she had shot for *The Prime Time*, and re-film it with another actress.
- + In medicine, the word "pica" is defined as "an abnormal craving or appetite for nonfood substances." Sufferers have been known to ingest large amounts of pins, coins, paint and dirt.
- + Body snatchers in 18th century London who stole corpses to sell for medical dissection and study were rarely targeted by authorities; neither were the doctors found with these illegally attained remains.

- Compiled by **Monica S. Kuebler**
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outside Roswell was an experimental weather balloon. Everything was under control. The public has nothing to fear. There is no proof of extraterrestrial life. Investigations have revealed that the patterns discovered in the cornfields are an elaborate hoax. All testing at that location has ceased. No eyewitnesses have come forth. Further studies will not be necessary. All records have no records of that incident. There is no proof of that incident. All materials found at that site have been proven to be man-made. Meteorologists have concurred that the phenomenon observed was ball lightning. The M1-12 documents have absolutely no basis in fact. We have top men looking into that. No such government program exists. Investigations into that matter have been closed. We appreciate your interest, but there is nothing to be concerned about. There is nothing of public interest at Groom Lake. The object sighted in that area was an Air Force prototype. No remains were recovered at that site. The public can expect full disclosure of our findings. We have no records of any recovered materials being subjected to a so-called "hammer test." Eyewitness testimony has been proven false. No evidence of crash landing was found. Further Ranch inquiries have been made. Heightened security has interfered with radar system. The area has been closed off for military training exercises. Those claims are false. Public safety is at the forefront of our concerns. No intelligent life forms have been encountered. Cryptologists have analyzed the message and have determined that it is gibberish. The Earth is in no danger. Move along. The debris remains at Roswell. No experiments. Weather balloon. No high speed controls. No public has nothing to fear. There is no proof of extraterrestrial life. Investigations have revealed that the patterns discovered in the cornfields are an elaborate hoax. All testing at that location has ceased. No eyewitnesses have come forth. Further studies will not be necessary. All is well. We have no records of that incident. There is no proof of that incident. All materials found at that site have been proven to be man-made. Meteorologists have concurred that the phenomenon observed was ball lightning. The M1-12 documents have absolutely no basis in fact. We have top men looking into that. No such government program exists. Investigations into that matter have been closed. We appreciate your interest, but there is nothing to be concerned about. There is nothing of public interest at Groom Lake. The object sighted in that area was an Air Force prototype. No remains were recovered at that site. The public can expect full disclosure of our findings. We have no records of any recovered materials being subjected to a so-called "hammer test." Eyewitness testimony has been proven false. No evidence of crash landing was found. Further Ranch inquiries have been made. Heightened security has interfered with radar system. The area has been closed off for military training exercises. Those claims are false. Public safety is at the forefront of our concerns. No intelligent life forms have been encountered. Cryptologists have analyzed the message and have determined that it is gibberish. The Earth is in no danger. Move along.



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For horror fans, 2006 is the Year of the Remake. It seems any and every fright flick of note – particularly those from the Golden Age 1970s – is getting a major studio makeover. Without a doubt, one of the most anticipated is Alexandre Aja's return to Wes Craven's nasty low-budget hitbilly horror classic *THE HILLS HAVE EYES*.

THE EVIL THAT MEN REDO

by JOHN W. BOWEN

When it comes to remakes, experience has left even the most forgiving horror fan weighed down with prejudices. One can only get mugged repeatedly and intellectually so many times before carrying a weapon becomes a perfectly reasonable response; cynicism has become our alarm of choice, and with good reason, we're more trigger-happy than ever.

Too few in the film industry fully appreciate that remaking a film is not as simple as remounting a stagecoach stage play. *King Lear*, *Charlie's Aunt* and *Waiting for Godot* were all written with multiple interpretations in mind, but few filmmakers (if any) have ever gone into production wondering what someone else might do with the same story decades down the road. By its very design, the remake is a perilous pursuit.

So why do we keep coming back? The diamond is the rougher, of course. *The Thing*, *The Fly*, both remounts of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*; Marcus Nispel's surprisingly assured retelling (as it were) of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Quality remakes may be few and far between, but they come along just often enough to keep us from calling for an all-out boycott. Besides, it may simply be part of our DNA. That same inexplicable, dorky pathology that drives the average horror fan to gamble – against better judgment – on wretched sequels like *Halloween: Resurrection* or *Alien Vs. Predator* goes a long way toward explaining why we lined up for an inferior and pointless remake of *The Fog* last fall.

Of course, if there were any hard and fast rules or even widely accepted guidelines for remaking horror films, we probably wouldn't see so many bad ones. Improved special effects were crucial to remakes of *The Fly* and *The Thing*, and yet Jan De Bont's inexcusable CGI makeover of *The Haunting* – the original a masterpiece of subtle psychological horror – is nothing short of vandalism. Two remakes of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, on the other hand, prove that in some cases the same basic plotline can resonate surprisingly well in different eras, making for some compelling social commentary. Some prove that it's possible to rescue a cool concept that was

surely botched the first time around (*The Toolbox Murders*, as others simply recycle flawed source material into something even worse (*The Hills Have Eyes*).

While bigger-budgeted horror remakes like *The Amityville Horror* feature the odd familiar face, the talent behind the camera is often a different story, mainly because horror is primarily a director's medium. It's significant that genre gods like John Carpenter and David Cronenberg court remakes among their first work, while Todd Hooper's in-name-only retelling of *The Toolbox Murders* signaled his triumphant return to form in 2004 after twenty-odd years of misfires.

Indeed, of horror's most revered masters, only George Romero and a select few others have not yet waded into this perilous swamp. While Wes Craven (see p.10) hasn't delivered one yet himself, he had at one time been working on a revival of Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Kairo* (aka *Pulse*), and has executive produced several remakes, including French wunderkind Alexandre Aja's new remake of Craven's own seminal low-budget hitbilly horror classic: *The Hills Have Eyes*.

Aja, a 27-year-old Parisian with one feature under his belt seems like an unlikely choice for the project, but his other film, *Haute Tension* (*RMK37*), about a ruthless aerial killer slashing his way through the French countryside, is driven by a similar raw desperation and gory brutality as *Hills*. But this is a significantly different film – in many ways (see p.29 for review).

A much larger budget has allowed Aja and his team to configure up significantly more deformed – CGI and prosthetic-enhanced – misfits (see p.22), elaborate desert wasteland set pieces, and a longer running time with room for even more atrocities committed against the stranded travelers. It's horror at its hardest, but has it recaptured the ugly spirit of the original in a new generation, or has it simply used a classic premise to carve an entirely new path through that familiar landscape? Where does a filmmaker draw the line between old and new, and more importantly, how does he walk it?

Aja, just prior to the release of his *Hills Have Eyes* remake, takes *Rue Morgue* on that journey.

"Two specific movies, **DELIVERANCE** and **STRAW DOGS**, were exactly our targets when [re]making **THE HILLS HAVE EYES**."

Alexandre Aja

Was it always your Craven's idea for you to [re]make *Hills*?

Yes [he wanted someone] respectful of the original film, and on the other hand, also able to bring a new approach to the text.

Did Wes [the 1977 approach] actually work a little better?

It was mainly finding what's going to make the difference. First of all, to come up with the idea of the back story of the hill dwellers, something that justifies their presence and their rage, the way they act toward the travellers crossing their area. And so that's why we came up with the nuclear testing history.

Haute Tension was pretty successful. Do you think that because it had a kernel – the cult fans of *The Hills Have Eyes* are always there, optimistic about you doing a remake?

I guess so. Wes was a big fan of Haute Tension, and I guess that was the main reason he approached us. Without Haute Tension it would be impossible to do *The Hills Have Eyes*. It was the perfect next step for us.

Wesley Craven – think *The Hills Have Eyes*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Deliverance*, *Mother's Day*, things like that – is a very distinctly American horror subgenre which has its roots in the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, all the socio-political tensions of that era. Does the remake work as a (re)construction of that context?

We grew up watching all kinds of movies – French, Italian, Asian, American, from everywhere – and they are so universal. You can really rely on the subject and feel for the characters. Two specific movies, *Deliverance* and *Straw Dogs*, were exactly our targets when [re]making *The Hills Have Eyes*. I think the original *Hills Have Eyes* from '77 was about a family versus another family, and our approach in the new one was much more about a family trapped in the desert facing something unknown, something that wants to destroy them. We were much more [interested in] keeping that mystery, not jumping from one point of view to another.

In *Craven's* version, there were references to what happened 200 years [beforehand] (the first settlers) in the desert.

You know, it's funny, five or six years ago, before September 11th, this would have been a different kind of film. In a strange way, American culture as I see it now – coming from another country, and too young to have lived in the '70s – reminds me of what I've heard about the '70s. I mean, the fact that some people, like [Hill's protagonists] the Carter family, are so conservative, so religious. We keep that subtext in my movie; I think we even increase that subtext. "Who's the bad guy? We're the good guys." Even if you are always on the side of the victims, at one point you start wondering, "Who are the real victims in the story – the Carter family or the hill dwellers?"

What do you think your audience will have in common with Craven's?

There are no obligations, because I feel for that kind of movie from the '70s with my heart, for those Tobe Hooper, Wes Craven kind of films. The difference is that I think if someone proposed to me a remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, I would pass.

Why not?

Because *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is, for me, a big masterpiece. There is no movie so strong, so powerful, and so real [as the original], which wasn't exactly the case with *The Hills Have Eyes*. I love it for other reasons; for the dark humour in it, for

some of the dialogue. But [it wasn't] made in a very real way, as opposed to *Last House on the Left*, which was so real. *Hills* was more like a very dark, violent and brutal comedy. I mean, I'm sure people in the '70s were looking at that movie as something really scary, but when you watch it today, I think you can watch for other reasons.

How did the collaboration with Wes Craven start, and what did he think?

Wes told us at one of the first meetings, "I made my movie and I want you to make your movie."



Middle: *Living Scorn* as Phil in the new *Hills Have Eyes*.

REMAKE FUROR

Amidst scores of rumours and supposed false starts, the following selection of horror reboots in various levels of actual production (as of press time) are proof positive that 2006 is indeed the Year of the Remake.

Black Christmas (Elen Morgan, director)

Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things (Bob Clark, director)

The Crazies (Brad Anderson, director)

Creature From the Black Lagoon (Breck Eisner, director)

Creepshow (Matthew Leutwyler, co-writer)

Day of the Dead (Steve Miner, director)

Deathrace 3000 (Paul W.S. Anderson, director)

The Entity (Hideo Nakata, director)

The Eye (Hideo Nakata, director)

The Hitcher (Dave Meyers, director)

In-Utero (remake of *The Eye 2*) (Todd Stein, director)

Night of the Living Dead 3D (Jeff Broadstreet, director)

The Onion 666 (John Moore, director)

Piranha (Chuck Russell, director)

Pulse (Jim Sonzoro, director)

Sisters (Douglas Buck, director)

The Visiting (remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*) (Oliver Hirschbiegel, director)

The Wicker Man (Neil LaBute, director)

Compiled by Monica S. Kuebler

Sources: *The Internet Movie Database* and [Upcominghorrormovies.com](http://upcominghorrormovies.com)



The Onion 666



A claustrophobic moment in The Hills Have Eyes. (OL)

That was so gentlemanly of him. It was really against all the clichés about Hollywood producers. And it's really novel because we're working with a producer who was also the filmmaker of the original. It's very hard because whatever you do, it's still his baby.

I'm sure it must have been hard for him to let go.

Yeah, and sometimes we disagreed, but at the end of the day he would say, "Okay, you know what? I made my movie, and if you really believe you have to go in a new direction, I trust you."

Why did you wind up going with JMB for special effects rather than Glenetto De Rinaldi this time?

First of all, Glenetto wasn't available – he was on another project when we started production. Glenetto is great for the makeup but not really for prosthetics. I wanted him to come and do

the makeup on the Carter family, and all the injuries from the stuff that happens to them. But for the hill dwellers, with that background story, we based it on some real footage of the genetic effects of nuclear fallout [and] on some Chernobyl pictures we also used in the opening titles. It's really strong, so it's heavy prosthetic stuff.

Did you feel at all handicapped by the absence of Michael Berryman, given that he was the real visual trademark of the original film?

You know, we were wondering a lot about Berryman, because to a lot of fans he is the face of *The Hills Have Eyes*. We were thinking about having him come in and do a cameo in the movie but talking with Wes and the producers, it was like, having Michael Berryman in the new *Hills* would make it link more to the original, and it wouldn't be as different as it should be. And since we kept [Berryman's character]



WES CRAVEN explains how he walked the line between mentor and menace on Alexandre Aja's version of *The Hills Have Eyes*.

HIS MASTER'S MUTANTS

by Dave Alexander

There are two constants in the world of horror films: a) sharp gardening tools are never used for gardening, and b) any nasty little fright flick that was even moderately successful in the '70s or early-'80s will be tapped for a remake. Woodshed wesponny aside, it's a no-brainer that studios are strip mining their horror back catalogues: low budgets and a built-in audience make for a safe investment. Therefore, it's also no surprise that they tend to treat them as a testing ground. Remakes of *The Amityville Horror*, *Dawn of the Dead*, *The Fog* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* were all helmed by rookie feature directors looking to break into the industry (and results vary, to say the least), but such was not the case with *The Hills Have Eyes*.

Like John Carpenter and Tobe Hooper, Wes Craven was brought in to help produce the remake of his classic film, but his much-loved hillbilly horror tale was in the hands of one of the genre's hottest young horror directors, French filmmaker Alexandre Aja.

"It was on the strength of *High Tension* [a.k.a. *Haute Tension*, Aja's first feature]," says Craven, about why Aja was picked to remake his film. "It had a lot of style, it just looked extremely accomplished. All of us [producers] didn't like the ending but we felt like the guy really knew how to move camera. ... It's hard to find people who are a) good, and b) willing to do a remake, so that's how it happened."

Aja and his filmmaking partner Grégory Levasseur, who art-directed and co-wrote *Haute Tension*, penned the script under Craven's guidance. The younger filmmakers re-imagined the tale of wild desert cannibals, making them inbred descendants of miners who refused to

leave their land when the government turned it into a nuclear testing ground. Craven helped them overcome the French/English language barrier by tweaking the dialogue, but knew that at a certain point he had to stop back.

"Once we started shooting there was really almost no input," he explains. "In fact, I thought it was important that I not be in [Aja's] face during that period. I just put myself in his position, and I think it would be a nightmare to have some guy, who 30 years ago made a horror movie that's become famous, sitting on your set watching every move you make."

Craven's creative involvement didn't end at the script stage, however. When Aja completed his cut of *Hills* and submitted it to the MPAA, the certification board demanded cuts if the film hoped to squeak into theatres with an R rating. The director was upset, and Craven understood his frustration, perhaps better than most. Not only had producers forced him to shoot a different ending for *A Nightmare on Elm Street* back in the day, his last horror project, *Cursed*, was taken out of his hands and completely recut by Dimension Films, which pushed it into production before the script was even complete.

"I sat in the editing room with Alex for a day and figured out how to cut it without hurting it, hopefully," explains Craven. "It's still very, very powerful, I don't think any of the cuts really hurt it. I know he wanted to see the body smashed

THE HILLS HAVE EYES

A nice American family. They didn't want to kill. But they don't want to die.



PETER LEON PRESENTS A FILM BY WES CRAVEN THE HILLS HAVE EYES
STARRING SUSAN LINDER ROBERT HOUSER MARTIN SPIER
MUSIC BY STEVE WALLACE COSTUME DESIGNER JOHN STADNIAK
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS MICHAEL SEITZMAN & VIRGINIA WHEATON WRITTEN BY ETHEL CARTER

JAMES MCMURDO AS ARTIST

EDITED BY MICHAEL BOND PRODUCED BY WES CRAVEN
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WES CRAVEN

against the rock six times, but we did it three times or four times. That kind of stuff was hard for him, but I don't blame him."

That's the Catch-22 of remaking grindhouse films for mainstream audiences: what often drew genre fans to films like *The Hills Have Eyes* in the first place is their extreme nature. One of the most notorious of these is Craven's own debut, the ruthless rape-revenge film *The Last House on the Left*, which is also on track for a remake.

But just how unhealthy is Hollywood's obsessions with remakes? Is the trend bad for the genre?

Craven doesn't think so. For him, the answer is simple: "If the audience doesn't like it, they'll stop going to one particular kind [of film], and if the audience doesn't like remakes, they'll stop going." ☼



Emilie de Ravin (as Brenda Carter) in one of *Hills*' most disturbing scenes.

Pluto as not another character but as the lead bad guy in the movie, it was a big challenge to do something different and stronger than Berryman's character in the original. Our Pluto is really much more disturbing now. This new actor brought something new to the character, a kind of childlike violence. The challenge was to make *The Hills Have Eyes* as real as possible, even if we're talking about radioactive cannibal mutants in the desert. We wanted actors that weren't really well-known faces, because well-known faces will hurt the identification you have with the Carter family. And Ted Levine (serial killer Jame "Buffalo Bill" Gumb in *The Silence of the Lambs*) isn't playing a bad guy, he's playing Big Bob Carter. And you won't recognize him! He's amazing.

Gravett's original would be taking heavily criticized. Did you have the same work now with the MPAA?

Well, I guess it's always like that. The first cut that we showed them, they were like, "Aw, that's more than NC-17, it's so hardcore," but at the same time it was more about the psychology than anything else. It's gory, but it's not just a "gore movie," you know? We have some cannibal scenes, but not that much. I think what disturbed the MPAA more than the cannibal scenes was all the women-in-jeopardy stuff. It was all about going back and forth with [the MPAA] and managing to get something I'm happy with 'til you just have to be very patient with them.

Is there going to be a director's cut when it hits DVD?

Yeah, there will be. The difference is only like one or two minutes, which is not so much in the sense of bloody, gory shots. The tension's still the same. We did two test screenings and the response was very good. The results [allowed us] to keep the director's cut as the final cut.

It's [if recent horror films like *Wrong Turn*, *Cabin Fever*, and *The Devil's Rejects* have been very '70s-themed. Did these kind influence your project?

I think not. Like Rob Zombie, I still feel the influence of the '70s, so I think we have the same inspirations we had before for *House of 1000 Corpses* and the remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. The '70s are coming back with a really strong influence on all of us, maybe because we were so frustrated during the '90s. [Laughs] I mean, that was a bad ten years!

There's been a sort of wave of recent remakes. Are there any that you've particularly enjoyed?

House of the Dead was the only one I really enjoyed. I missed *The Fog*.

Trust me, you didn't miss *Twilight*!

[Laughs] And anyway, well, I don't like the original movie anyway. I'm

Are there any other films you'd like to remake?

There are thousands of remakes coming out, and there's about ten thousand starting to be developed by the studios. [Laughs] Someone was talking to me about *Shock Waves* a year ago! There are some ideas for remakes that are very good, very interesting, but I dunno. Right now we're doing another movie, an original script.

How's *The Waiting* going?

The Waiting, yes. We're going to do it in the spring.

Are there a lot of new remakes coming?

Yeah, exactly. We wanted to totally go in another direction, see what we can do with something that's more about psychology and less about prosthetics and makeup and blood and stuff. It's another world, and my favorite horror movie is still *The Shining*. *The Waiting* won't be *The Shining* — not even close — but it will be an exploration for me and my [filmmaking] partner Grégory Levasseur. After that, maybe we'll come back with something more "popcorn" — spectacular gore. I'd like to make a real *Evil Dead* type of film, something maybe not as real as *The Hills Have Eyes* or *High Tension*, but something really fun.



The shocking legend behind **THE HILLS HAVE EYES** goes back much further than even Wes Craven's 1977 film – all the way to a predatory cannibal clan in 15th century Scotland.

THE HIGHLANDS HAVE EYES

by Tom Murray



Call it the granddaddy of hillbilly horror stories: the legend of Sawney Bean. And although the authenticity of the events surrounding it is more than a little suspect, that hasn't stopped writers, musicians and filmmakers from retelling its gruesome details in different eras.

The tale centres around Alexander "Sawney" (pronounced "Shawney") Bean, a 15th century Scottish highwayman. Bean was a shiftless son of a trench digger who decided to find an easier way to put food on the table. Hooking up with an equally criminal-minded woman he relocated to a cave in East Lothian, which he and his wife used as a base from which to rob travellers. Bean quickly came to the conclusion that it was also cost effective to eat the victims, so he cut the body parts up into sections and pickled them for later use. It was a convenient way to hide the evidence, and since Bean was also successful at raising a rather large – and incestuous – family (47 by the time he was caught), it was also very pragmatic.

According to legend, the family killed thousands over a period of 25 years. They were so adept at their trade that they had an overstock of body parts, which they threw into the ocean. Of course, the superfluous arms and legs would eventually wash up on the shores of coastal towns, much to the dismay of residents. When finally tracked down in their cave after an aborted robbery, witnesses (including

King James I) were horrified to see the legs, arms, thighs, hands and feet of men, women and children hung up in rows. After their capture, the men in the family were apparently executed by having their hands and feet cut off, and were then left to bleed to death, while the women and children were said to have been forced to watch this before being burned alive.


As detailed as the legend is, though, there's simply nothing else to corroborate it. There are no allusions to such events in court documents or personal journals from the time. All that remains of the Bean legend is a more edited-for-shock-value mention in the *Newgate Calendars*, (subtitled *The Malefactors' Bloody Register*), a series of prison chapbooks that detail a history of crimes and criminals associated with London's Newgate Prison in the 18th and 19th centuries.

So whence came the story of Sawney Bean, cannibal/robber? Some point to the fact that cannibalism was a problem in areas of Scotland at the time, and that the legend grew out of several true cases; others to a possible political demonization of Scots by the English after continual tussling between the two countries. Most historians agree that neither theory quite holds up.

Nevertheless, Bean's myth has been passed down through the centuries, turning up in penny dreadfuls, pseudo scholarly publications

and eventually in recent songs by Shinklerfinger, The Real McKenzies and Sol Invictus. Of course, it's also the perfect framework for a horror movie. Wes Craven adapted it to 1970s rural America in *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977). Gary Sherman's earlier *Raw Meat* (a.k.a. *Dashline*, 1973) drew upon the tale, recasting it as a gruesome story of a cannibal patriarch preying on commuters in the London Underground and, more recently, the software *Samhain* (a.k.a. *Evil Breed*, 2003; see p.46) – featuring porn stars Ginger Lynn Allen and Jarna Jameson as American students (!) digging into Celtic legends – has a family of incestuous mutant flesh-eaters just aching for pretty girl body parts to snack on. And now director Alexandre Aja returns to the mutant-infested, sun-baked wastelands to retell Craven's version of the Sawney Bean tale.

It is, of course, a demonstration of how a good story transcends eras, and even nations. The same spook tale that robbed little Angus of sleep in a 15th century Glasgow slum reappears six centuries on to scare the bapass out of more "sophisticated" audiences hankering for cheap thrills. The current crop of remakes just strengthen the hold these primal myths have on our psyches, and no matter how polished, rethought or re-imagined, they still hew to the same primal fears that forever scare the hell out of us. ☞



Legendary effects guru GREG NICOTERO pools back the latex, foam and blood gel to give us a glimpse behind KNB's spectacular work on Alexander Aja's remake of *THE HILLS HAVE EYES*.

MAN MADE MONSTERS

by Jovanka Vuckovic

With an eighteen-year pedigree in the genre, it's safe to say that KNB EFX Group are effects masters. The company (whose name is comprised of the first letters of the last names of its three founding partners – Robert Kurtzman, Greg Nicotero and Howard Berger) has built a name for itself making practical effects and makeup so spectacular the work almost becomes a character in the films it's featured in. We'll forgive a lacklustre sequel like *Bride of Re-Animator* solely on the basis of its outrageously entertaining effects work, and champion movies like *From Dusk Till Dawn* because the gore helps the film hit its mark, as is the case with their most recent job, Alexander Aja's remake of *The Hills Have Eyes*.

KNB – which is now effectively 116 after Kurtzman bowed out a few years back – got its start on Scotty Spiegel's *Intruder (RM#48)* back in 1989, and before long was taking up the practical effects duties for scores of genre films, notably *Army of Darkness*, *In the Mouth of Madness*, *Scream*, *Ravenous*, *Bubba Ho-Tep*, *Cabin Fever*, the *House of Wax* remake, *Land of the Dead* (which features Nicotero as second unit director on the

gore pick-up shots), *Hostel*, the entire *Masters of Horror* series (*RM#50*) and, of course, *The Hills Have Eyes*.

If that isn't enough proof that the KNB crew are a horror director's go-to men when the need for bleed strikes, the company will also be heading up the practical work on Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez's upcoming drive-in throwback *Grindhouse* (2007). They've also adeptly handled effects work on an impressive resume of cult, fantasy and sci-fi films like *Reservoir Dogs*, the *Kill Bill* movies, *Six City*, *Serenity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, but a lifelong interest in horror keeps them coming back to black (Nicotero's first gig – where he befriended Berger – was on George Romero's *Day of the Dead*, as assistant to Tom Savini).

With that kind of experience, it's no surprise KNB's grisly work in Aja's hyper-violent take on Wes Craven's 1977 survivalist vehicle turned out as impressive and believable as it did.

Nicotero wipes his hands clean for a sit down with *Rue Morgue* to discuss KNB's approach to remaking the mutants in *The Hills Have Eyes*, as well as his thoughts on the rampant Hollywood remake phenomenon.

From a makeup standpoint, how did you approach remaking The Hills Have Eyes?

The whole subtext of the film was that there was a group of people living in New Mexico during the '40s, '50s and '60s that refused to leave, it was basically their home. Whether the government was doing nuclear testing there or not, they didn't care, they wanted to stay. So the whole idea of the mutants was that they weren't just feral creatures, they were actually mutated by radiation. There was a lot of talk initially about having Michael Berryman do a cameo because he's so

instantly recognizable and tied to the film, so when we were designing Pluto's makeup we knew that people were gonna go, "Hey, that doesn't look anything like Michael Berryman!" So it was certainly a challenge, but the reality was that we were going for much more of an innocent Slob from *The Goonies* look.

How much input did you get from Aja?

We started with Photoshop design work based on the descriptions in the script and meeting with Alex and [KNB's co-writer] Grégory Levasseur.

Scott Patton, who's an amazing artist that works here, did all the Photoshop art and from there we designed full-size maquettes of each character. There was a point when Dimension was making the film and dropped it before Fox picked it up, and there were six weeks where we didn't know who was going to make the movie so we took advantage of that time and refined the sculptures. By the time Alex and Grégory came in they would actually be able to look at their characters in full-size painted clay with hair on them. It was essential that they were around for that design phase.

"The whole idea of the mutants was that they weren't just feral creatures, they were actually mutated by radiation." **Greg Nicotero**

Were you referencing any bona fide radiation-related mutation photos when you were designing the mutants?

Alex and Gregory had done quite a bit of research. Robert Joy's makeup, for example — he plays Lizard in the script — was described as having weird clawed hands and a cleft palate, and we took that further by adding a weird sunburn kind of flakiness to his skin because his name was Lizard. We also decided to give the Pluto character soft, baby-like mohair instead of coarse hair, to sort of indicate he wasn't quite finished forming. But we didn't utilize photos of real mutation; sometimes I find that a bit distasteful to use photos of people who were unfortunate enough to be genetically malformed. Most of it was taken from conceptual ideas as they were described in the script.

How much of the makeup was done practically and in post?

When we were designing all of the characters, the first thing that we talked about with Ruby's character — the little girl — was that they wanted her eyes to be spaced out unnaturally and offset. So we said, "Listen guys, there's no way that you're going to get an appliance that's gonna look realistic, that's gonna have blink and movement." Our approach to that was that it should be done with the computer. They shot Laura, the actress, and spread her eyes apart in post. There were two kids in a nursery that were also done with computer but the rest of the family was done practically.

Despite the fact that you worked on it and it turned out quite well, do you feel this movie really needed to be made?

Well, the remake scenario is such a touchy subject. There are a lot of films that I feel should not be remade and then there are films that I feel can be updated and given a different flair. Remaking *Psycho*, I thought, was completely ridiculous, and I wasn't a huge fan of the *Dawn of*

the Dead remake only because I love George Romero — he's one of my oldest and dearest friends. I love that movie, it was seminal to my existence in terms of growing up watching that movie and [it] inspiring me. But then you turn around and look at Carpenter's *The Thing* and that movie also inspired a generation of horror fans and makeup effects guys, and that's of course a remake of the Howard Hawks movie. So I can't give you a blanket statement on remakes being a bad or good idea because remakes for me are tremendously personal and that's what makes it really difficult to forgive some of them.

*But with regards to *The Hills Have Eyes*, now that seemed like a film that could definitely be improved upon.*

I agree, the original had such a cult following [but] it wasn't necessarily a big mainstream hit. I think that Alex did a great job rethinking *Hills*; the actors are great and the updated story — although much more violent than its predecessor — works well today.

Why do you think there's so much interest in remaking horror films right now?

It's a tried and true formula, it's name recogni-

tion. I think that's why the *Dawn of the Dead* remake made more money than *Land of the Dead*, because *Land* didn't have the name recognition of something that was on video shelves for years that kids could see or older people like us can say, "Oh I saw that movie when I was a little kid and I wanna go check out what they did with the remake." Also, let's face it, the film industry is about making money. It's very rarely about people with a vision who have this amazing story they want to tell. It's about how much money your movie made the opening weekend.

What keeps bringing you back to horror after all these years?

I've always loved horror films since I was a little kid. I used to go see so many films that would scare the hell out of me [so] that I couldn't sleep. The adrenaline rush from that terror was so intoxicating. I mean, the first time I saw *Jaws* I remember thinking, "How did they do that?"

Well, now it's your turn to scare the hell out of a generation of kids.

And I have to say that it warms my heart that Howard and I have been able to leave our mark on the horror legacy. ☺





Though we're caught in the eye of a horror remake storm, everyone knows the phenomenon began decades ago.

Rue Morgue takes a look back at some noteworthy examples of the good, the bad and the pointless.

REDUCE, REUSE, REANIMATE

A Horror Remake Primer

by John W. Bowen and Jovanka Vuckovic

2001 MANIACS

(2006, Tim Sullivan)

Amusing gore gags and cool carnies aside, this pacen to H.G. Lewis' 1964 *Two Thousand Maniacs!* boasts too many bad puns and even worse actors to make it worth watching over the original grindhouse groundbreaker.

THE AMITYVILLE HORROR

(2005, Andrew Douglas)

Despite the efforts of some impressive talent on both sides of the camera, the original *Amityville Horror* was pretty lame. So how do you revisit the film in question, armed with several decades' worth of hindsight and technological improvements, and make it **EVEN WORSE**? Apparently, this is how.

BOOY SNATCHERS

(1993, Abel Ferrara)

This underrated effort by the notoriously inconsistent Ferrara (whose better work includes *Ms. 45* and *Rad Lieutenant*) is big on action and icy special effects, but also channels the bleak socio-political satire of the original more faithfully than Philip Kaufman did in 1978.

THE BLOO

(1988, Chuck Russell)

This retooling of the 1958 classic (which stars Steve McQueen) is as campy and entertaining as a B-movie should be, plus it steps up the gooey gore considerably. Unstoppable!

CARIE

(2002, David Carson)

Carrie purists will bemoan the absence of Brian De Palma's arch operatic sensibility, but this comparatively restrained reading is much more faithful to Stephen King's breakout debut novel and showcases the astounding Angela (Mia) Bettis, the only woman alive who could step into Sissy Spacek's most famous role and make it her own.

CAT PEOPLE

(1982, Paul Schrader)

With plenty of eroticism, atmosphere and subtext, Schrader's dusty update Jacques Tourneur's (Val Lewton-produced) 1942 story of a woman with deadly feline attributes.

DAWN OF THE DEAD

(2004, Zack Snyder)

Though the first seven minutes of this arguably blasphemous big-budget remake of Romero's 1978 favourite are pure gold, poor characterization and flashy, music video editing rob it of all the jewels its predecessor had.

THE FLY

(1986, David Cronenberg)

The Fly is a rare example of a remake that confidently bumps the original. As diverse and esoteric as Cronenberg's oeuvre may be, he's best known for turning hyper-violent B-movies into sophisticated vehicles of existential angst, and he's seldom done it better than this.

THE FOG

(2005, Rupert Wainwright)

If you must remake a John Carpenter film, why not tackle one of his lesser works? Cooper Lane's disarmingly uninspired screenplay is the main offender here, which may explain Wainwright's apparent lack of connection to the material.

GOZILLA

(1998, Roland Emmerich)

Paragraphs upon paragraphs could be spewed forth about why Emmerich's mindless, tacky, gazillion-dollar fiasco didn't work, but Brad Abraham nailed it succinctly way back in *AMV12*: "It is integral to the underlying harmony of the universe that Godzilla must be a man in a rubber suit. Anyone who tells you different is in need of a good smack." Amen, Brother Abraham.

THE GRUDGE

(2004, Takashi Shimizu)

It's not surprising that the fifth time Japanese director Shimizu remade his own film, *Ju-On*, it fell hard on its ass. Sarah Michelle Gellar and a nonsensical script make for one of the worst J-horror remakes in recent history.



The Blob '88

THE HAUNTING

(1999, Jan de Bont)

Bad remakes are plentiful, but this profoundly inept rape of the 1933 haunted house classic practically qualifies as a crime against humanity.

HOUSE OF WAX

(1953, André De Toth)

Starring a typically sinister Vincent Price, and shot in lurid 3-D, André de Toth's take on the 1933 chiller *The Mystery of the Wax Museum* (see p.94) is the height of theatrical machine fun. Of course, it in turn was remade recently as a bloody teen vehicle by Dark Castle, and, go figure, turned out to be the best thing they've done to date — if just for the brutal death of Paris Hilton's character.

HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL

(1999, William Malone)

Besides the stupid but somewhat guilty pleasures the *House of Wax* remake elicits, Dark Castle gets a collective failing mark for its retellings of *House on Haunted Hill*, *13 Ghosts* and *Ghost Ship*. Easily the most shameful bastardizations in the pantheon of remakes.

NUMAKOIDS FROM THE DEEP

(1996, Jeff Yaris)

You'd think legendary B-producer Roger Corman (*RMSF*) would be capable of recycling his own low-brow drive-in classic, but ill-advised attempts at sophisticating this rubber-suit-number exploitation opera only erode the original's infectious dumb-ass charm without even offering extra violence or nudity as collateral.

INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

(1978, Philip Kaufman)

Even though Kaufman's film is less politically resonant than Don Siegel's 1956 entry, Donald Sutherland leveling his gaze at us and issuing forth an unearthly scream is worth the price alone.

THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU

(1996, John Frankenheimer)

H.G. Wells' story of mad science and animal-human hybrids had been adapted twice before as *Island of Lost Souls* (1933) and then with the story's original title, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1977). Unfortunately Frankenheimer's remake was as awkward as bloated star Marlon Brando... but not nearly as creepy.

KING KONG

(2005, Peter Jackson)

As technically accomplished as it is, Jackson's lengthy, mega-budget reboot is uneven and lacks the heart of Merian C. Cooper's 1933 blockbuster. The frolicking-on-a-frozen-pond scene in particular has to go.

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD

(1990, Tom Savini)

It's hard to begrudge gore effects king and first-time director Savini, as his heart is obviously in the right place, but remaking *Night of the Living Dead* just seems monumentally unnecessary. The elaborate gore actually does seem appropriate, but colour is just ideologically wrong for a remake of humor's last quintessential black and white classic.



TCM '03 and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* '76.

NOSFERATU THE VAMPIRE

(1979, Werner Herzog)

Klaus Kinski channels Max Schreck to an uncanny degree, and Isabelle Adjani makes for one bodice-rippingly beautiful heroine, but Herzog's narcissism and obsession with eye candy ensure that this picture scarcely has a thought in its pretty little head.

PSYCHO

(1998, Gus Van Sant)

Well, jeep Louise, it just kinda goes without saying, doesn't it? NEXT...

THE RING

(2002, Gore Verbinski)

For those who've never witnessed Hideo Nakata's pioneering 1998 original, the PG-13 remake was a hair-raising experience. But knowing the terrifying and moodier original exists, it's hard to understand why this one really needed to be made.

SALEN'S LOT

(2004, Mikael Salomon)

This second misfires treatment of Stephen King's vampire opus is beautifully shot, and yet *Tobe Hooper's* 1980 version conveyed so much more palpable dread with less conspicuous effort. Stilted dialogue, telegraphed scares, ham-fisted performances and pointless, arbitrary revisions to practically every character and plot point undermine this one at every turn.

THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE

(1975, Peter Collinson)

This British production falls well short of the 1946 classic (*RMSF*), but it's still a damn sight more watchable than the other two remakes, thanks largely to a kick-ass cast including Christopher Plummer and Jacqueline Bisset.

THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE

(2003, Marcus Nispel)

While we hunkered down and prepared for the worst

from this former music video director, we were blindsided by a shockingly smart, uncompromisingly tough, well-executed film.

THE THING

(1982, John Carpenter)

Widely regarded as the best horror retrofit ever, *The Thing* features Rob Bottin's jaw-dropping animatronic creature effects — that, two decades later, haven't eroded in the slightest — along with Carpenter's atmospherics and the spot-on ensemble cast. Not even *George Romero* could concoct such a download ending that's still so eddy exhilarating.

TOOLBOX MURDERS

(2004, Tobe Hooper)

After decades of missteps (*Crossed*) and bombs (*The Mangler*), Hooper came roaring back to re-establish his mastery of both graphic gore and quiet, lyrical scenes. Bonus: it stars Angela Bettis, arguably the best thing to happen to horror cinema since the invention of karo synp.

THE VANISHING

(1993, George Sluizer)

When George Sluizer remade his own terrifying 1988 kidnapping thriller (a Dutch/French co-production) for Hollywood, it amounted to bigger stars, less tension and a forced ending. A weak rehash.

WAR OF THE WORLDS

(2005, Steven Spielberg)

Not even couch-jumping lunatic Tom Cruise can sway this blockbuster from pleasing crowds with an entertaining adaptation of the classic H.G. Wells work and nod to the 1953 Byron Haskin original. It's popcorn alien invasion cooked well done.

WILLARD

(2003, Glen Morgan)

Though Orson Glover virtually became *Willard* in this up-do of Daniel Mann's 1971 social misfit-gets-revenge vehicle, neither film has quite the same charm that the novel *The Rainman's Notebook* does. **B-**

With two of his twisted stories recently translated into English, *Rue Morgue* takes a look back at the father of the Japanese mystery story.

A detailed black and white illustration of a hand holding a revolver. A small lizard is perched on the barrel of the gun. The background is dark and textured.

EROTIC GROTESQUE

THE STRANGE TALES OF EDOGAWA RAMPO

BY JASON LAPEYRE

In Tokyo, in 1922, Edogawa Rampo created a world. And on the first day, Rampo said of his world, "Let there be darkness." He brought forth this realm from a love of the fog-shrouded mysteries of Edgar Allan Poe and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and fused them with a Japanese legacy of strange and beautiful horror. It's a place populated by the grotesque, the deformed, the desperate and the insane, a place driven by sexual perversion, existential angst, and murderous impulses; a realm that explores the limits of the five senses. Unlike Poe and Conan Doyle, Rampo's work is both gruesome and erotic.

Rampo is now commonly cited as the "father of the Japanese mystery story", and his popularity is rising in the West, even though little of his work is available in English. After being exposed to Poe's fiction, the author named himself after his idol via a Japanese-English bastardization of "Edgar Allan Poe". (Say his name out loud a few times and you'll notice the phonetic similarity.) This led Japanese critics to decry his early writing as merely a weak facsimile of Poe's work but they soon discovered Rampo's world was wholly its own.

This world, in fact, sprang from Rampo's own experiences. Born in 1894, he came of age during the Taisho period (1912-26), usually summed up in Japanese history books by the phrases "rapid modernization" and "increased Western influence". His real name was Hirai Taro and he was always a writer, dabbling in amateur magazines and journalism as a young man. But when he was twenty he read Poe for the first time and became obsessed. The increased Japanese interest in Western culture at the time had flooded the market with translations of everything that was then available by Poe. Likewise, he devoured Conan Doyle and the French writer Maurice Leblanc. After failing to start a used bookshop with his brothers, he decided to write a Japanese version of a Poesian mystery story.

Much like in the West, the early '20s gave rise to popular magazines in Japan, and the unit of storytelling currency they traded in was the short

"RAMPO'S STORIES OFTEN ATTEMPT TO CREATE A BIZARRE MIXTURE OF SENSUAL EXPERIENCES, ONES OFTEN BORN IN BLOOD."

story. In 1922 Rampo published his first tale, Nisen-Doka ("The Two-Sen Copper Coin") in a monthly magazine called Shin Seinen ("New Youth"). He published another story the same year, and they were both hits. The magazine wanted more, and in 1925 they demanded a story a month. Rampo smiled, quit his job at a newspaper and went to work. He wrote his first serialized novel in 1928, called *Jiyu* ("The Beast in The Shadows"). Legend has it that he would write only by candlelight, shuttering his study windows during the day to simulate night.

The stories attracted readers curious to see what new deviance Rampo could imagine. His characters were cannibals (Maneuvering Darkness); they created and subjected themselves to hells of their own devising (The Hell Of Mirrors); they murdered men who looked like them and stole their wealth to build island utopias (A Strange Tale Of Panorama Island). And throughout his tales, Rampo's obsession with the senses created strange and powerful visceral images that haunted the imagination.

The Human Chair, for example, takes the form of a letter written to a woman by a hideously deformed chair-maker who loves her. Knowing that she could never return his love, he confesses to her that he has built a special chair, hollow on the inside. He wants to live inside the chair so that she might sit on him and let him feel her, as a substitute for love. He ends the letter by telling her that he has already built the chair, and had it delivered to her house; in fact, it is the chair she is sitting in now as she reads.

Rampo's stories often attempt to create a bizarre mixture of sensual experiences, ones often born in blood. In A Strange Tale Of Panorama Island the detective Kitami Kogoro uncovers the protagonist Hitomi's trail of murder and impersonation and comes to the island paradise to take him to jail. The detective soaks in a hot

spring, waiting for Hitomi to reappear so he can arrest him. He's startled by a sudden fireworks display and sees red drops falling from the sky. Then he discovers a severed hand floating in the water beside him.

Kitami Kogoro, although he wondered about the unclothed maidens who did not make a fuss about this bloody scene, did not react to it either. He laid his head on the bank of the hot spring and absentmindedly stared at the flowery, red cut end of the severed hand floating around his chest.

Thus, the body of Hitomi Kosuke was blown to pieces with the fireworks and fell, as a rain of blood and pieces of flesh, to every corner of the scenery in the panorama kingdom he had created.

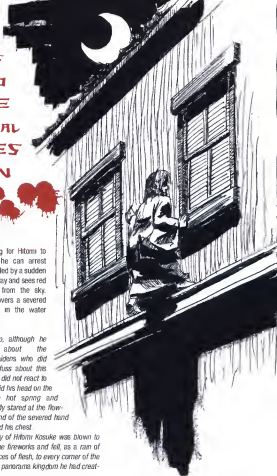
This perverse blend of sensory input – naked skin, hot water, steam, a cool rain of blood and flesh, the back of the head resting on a bank, the sight of the fleshy stump of a human hand bobbing in water – made Rampo's world immensely popular with Japanese audiences whose world was itself filled with new sensory input, increasingly taken over by machines and the exotic West.

By the '30s Rampo's reputation started to decline, though. As the Taisho period ended, national pride rose, and with it nationalism and militarism. Government censorship was dominant, Japan invaded China, pro-war writing was in, and Ero-guro (the Erotic/Grotesque genre) was out. It was during this time that Rampo

Beast in The Shadows: Rampo's first serialized novel (1928).

wrote one of his most disturbing stories, the one that distills all his obsessions – the erotic, the grotesque, and the senses: *Imomushi* ("The Caterpillar").

In it, Lieutenant Sunaga loses all four limbs in battle, as well as his ability to speak or hear. He can only communicate with his wife Tokiko through sign. Sunaga grows bored with his limited life and seeks escape through food and sex. His wife's descriptions of him gradually turn him from human into an object. She begins by calling him "that poor crippled man" but soon sees him as a "strange, gruesome thing" and a



A new book from Kurodahan Press translates two of EDOGAWA RAMPO'S murder-mystery novellas for North American readers.

WICE-TOLD TALES

BY JASON LAPEYRE

After many decades, the bizarre Poe-inspired murder-mysteries of Edogawa Rampo may finally get the recognition they deserve in North America. Kurodahan Press' *Two Classics of Suspense and Detection by Edogawa Rampo* combines a pair of early tales that despite the occasional clunky translation are well worth the time to sleuth out.

The first novella, *The Black Lizard*, tells the story of the rivalry between Rampo's recurring hero detective (inspired by Poe's own recurring Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin character) Akachi Kogoro and a fiendish underworld gangstress named The Black Lizard who's hell-bent on kidnapping the beautiful daughter of a wealthy merchant. The story has the lightness, wit and charm of a Hitchcock thriller, but without surrendering the eroticism or grisly imagery Rampo is so well-known for.

Opening in the after-hours Ginza underworld, the titular character (no pun intended) enters doing her "Jewel Dance", writhing her naked body to make it look like the black lizard tattooed on her arm is actually crawling up her skin. It's a hell of an entrance, and her confidence, intelligence and cunning make her seem unstoppable. That is, until we meet Kogoro, who's ready to take on the Black Lizard's twisted mind.

It's a great yarn, with the Black Lizard carrying out her bizarre and ingenious plans time and again, only to have Kogoro pull the rug out just when it seems hopeless. It's a testament to

Rampo's skill that the repetition of this pattern throughout the novella doesn't become tiresome. The characters are memorable and portrayed with imagination — make no mistake about it, the Black Lizard is a bad girl. She digs through a pile of corpses to find just the right match for a man whose death she wants to fake, and strips naked for an underling to test the size of a trunk she wants to stuff a kidnapping victim into. She even tricks Kogoro into wagering that he'll give up being a detective if she wins.

Unfortunately, the translation (by Ian Hughes) occasionally trips up the wit and flow of Rampo's storytelling. It may be faithful, but some of the dialogue comes off as wooden. Couldn't they have used some 1930s English-language slang to reproduce the idiomatic Japanese of these gangsters and detectives? Despite the wooden word-play, it's still a great story and a fascinating trip into a seedy 1920s Japan.

The second novella, *The Beast in the Shadows*, is shorter than the first but no less entertaining. A young woman named Shizuko enlists the aid of the narrator — a mystery novelist — to protect her from the threats of a jilted lover, who's also a mystery novelist. She receives letters from her ex-lover describing how he watches everything she does, detailing how he will exact his brutal

revenge on her. The two writers engage in a battle of wits over the woman they both love and, with methodical precision, the narrator slowly begins to unravel the web-like maze that surrounds Shizuko and her ghostlike stalker.

Rampo's talent for gruesome imagery is operating at full power here. The narrator falls in love with the dark red welts on Shizuko's neck left by her husband's whip; her stalker spies on her from the attic, peering through a crack in the ceiling while dressed in a pointed red hat and clown costume, and a murder victim is pushed out of his own window onto shards of glass that are glued to the top of the wall to prevent intruders.

Yet there's another level of enjoyment to this story: Rampo's constant references to his own

work and his status as a mystery novelist. The narrator describes his adversary's stories as "gory, ghoulish and evil... full of unpleasant expressions that caused your hair to stand on end..." Fans of the genre are called "degenerate readers." As well, the story acknowledges that the antagonist appears to be re-enacting plot devices from several of Rampo's old stories!

It all teeters on the ridiculous, but is just sinister enough to keep from flipping. Rampo's sarcasm adds to the sophistication of the story, and while it doesn't clip along quite as enjoyably as *The Black Lizard*, it's still a well-told tale with grotesquely memorable moments. Hopefully Kurodahan is planning future volumes now that we've had these two glimpses into Rampo's twisted worlds. ☹



"crawling worm" (the story is an obvious influence on the famous manga tale *The Bug Boy*, by Hideshi Hino; *RM* #42). Sunaga demands sex from his wife night and day, but then Tokiko starts to enjoy it and eventually forces him to have sex, often against his will. They cut themselves off from society and sink into sexual debauchery, where she finds pleasure in control. But when Sunaga's eyes no longer reflect emotion, Tokiko goes berserk, thinking she's lost control over him. At the height of sexual frenzy, she gouges his eyes out with her bare hands:

What was most clear to her was that she felt her husband's eyes, the eyes that spoke, as a hindrance to their becoming lowly animals. She hated what might be called the concept of justice, which surfaced once in a while in his eyes...

But that was a lie. Was there not a much different, more horrible idea deep in her heart? Didn't she want to turn him into a real, living dead body? Didn't she want to turn him into a complete lump of flesh? Into a creature which lost all five senses other than the sense on his torso? And didn't she want to satisfy her insatiable cruelty?

Tokiko flees the scene, leaving Sunaga alone. When she returns the next day, Sunaga has committed suicide by crawling into a well. He has left her a note with three words scrawled on it: I forgive you.

The story was banned by the government. They objected not to the deviant sexuality or the perverse moral sensibilities, but to the protagonist being a crippled war veteran. They declared the story to have "an anti-war sentiment." Rampo protested political interpretations of the story. In his memoirs he writes, "...why God created human beings is a hundred times more fundamental and a hundred times more powerful than the questions of war and peace, and the political claims made by leftists."

It was the beginning of the end of Rampo's popularity, and after World War II he was reduced to writing juvenile detective stories featuring boy sleuths—a sort of Japanese *Hardy Boys*. In 1961 he wrote his memoirs, in 1963 he developed Parkerson's, and by 1965 he was dead.

Rampo's influence in Japan is undeniable. He wrote the first popular series of horror and mystery short stories in the Western style; he created the first serialized detective character in Akechi Kogoro; and his stories tapped into the anxieties of a culture undergoing rapid change, repression, and exotic influence. He also helped found, and was named president of, the Japanese Association of Mystery Writers. Its highest award, given annually to the finest example of mystery writing, is called the Rampo.

Rampo has lived on in cinema, as well (see sidebar). Twenty-eight films have been made from his work, the first in 1927, the most recent



An interior illustration from *Rampo's The Black Lizard*.

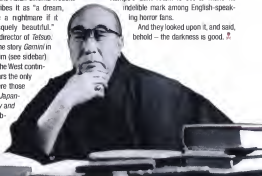
last year. They have shared the deviant nature of their inspiration: the 1968 version of *Beast in the Shadows* starred a transvestite as the female protagonist and boasted a script (and cameo) by Mishima Yukio, the conservative writer who later publicly committed suicide to protest the Westernization of Japan. *The Horror of Malformed Men* (1969) combines elements from several Rampo stories and the Asian cinema website Midnight Eye describes it as "a dream, one that would be a nightmare if it weren't so grotesquely beautiful." Shinya Tsukamoto, director of *Tetsuo: Iron Man*, adapted the story *Gemini* in 1999 to great acclaim (see sidebar).

His reputation in the West continues to grow. For years the only stories available were those in James B. Harris' *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, published in 1966, but the seven

movies released since 1994's *Rampo* have helped fuel an interest in the writer. Kurodahan Press has recently released a translation of a pair of novellas entitled *Two Classics of Suspense and Detection* by Edogawa Rampo—which signals the first appearance in English of both *Beast in the Shadows* and *The Black Lizard*. Now, 84 years after he created it,

Rampo's dark realm is set to make its indelible mark among English-speaking horror fans.

And they looked upon it, and said, behold—the darkness is good. ☞



THE HORROR OF
MALFORMED MEN



ORZIV CINEMA

BY TOM MES

If Edogawa Rampo is known for one thing in his homeland, it's for being thoroughly twisted. It's no wonder then that his stories have attracted some of Japan's most far-out filmmakers over the past six decades – the list of Rampo movie adaptations reads like a who's who

of extreme Japanese cinema. Forget about "J-horror," if you like your fright with some real bite (and you don't mind the occasional bit of deformity, kinky sex and a whipping or two), try out these admittedly often hard to find but exquisitely sordid cinematic visions from Edogawa Rampo's world.

BLACK LIZARD

(Kinji Fukasaku, 1968)

Kinji (*Battle Royale!*) Fukasaku may be better known for his yakuza films, but for this rare outing he dragged in literary giant Yukio Mishima, cross-dressing cabaret diva Akihiko Miwa and Isao Kimura (one of the *Seven Samurai*), to come up with what is best described as a mix of Raymond Chandler and John Waters. Stuffed corpses have never looked quite so beautiful.



THE BLIND BEAST

(Yasuzo Masumura, 1969)

A blind sculptor kidnaps a gorgeous nude model and locks her in his dungeon-like workshop. In this hellish place the walls are lined with giant statues of ears, eyes, noses and mouths, and the floor looks like a life-size body cast of the 50-Foot Woman. The recalcitrant hostage is starved and stripped, then Stockholm Syndrome sets in and the sculptor's overbearing mother becomes jealous. That's when the fun really starts. Superbly directed by Yasuzo Masumura, *The Blind Beast* plays like the wet dream of a *Psycho*-era Alfred Hitchcock.

THE WATCHER IN THE ATTIC

(Noboru Tanaka, 1978)

With their torrents of fetishistic sex, the notorious Roman Porno films churned out by the Nikkatsu studio in the 1970s were the perfect breeding ground for an outstanding Rampo adaptation. Leading Roman Porno auteur Noboru Tanaka understandably zoomed in on the various perverted pleasures in this tale of an innkeeper who likes to spy on his guests through holes in the ceiling, but things turn decidedly bloody toward the end.

GEMINI

(Shinya Tsukamoto, 1999)

No round-up of twisted Japanese movies would be complete without mention of the great Shinya Tsukamoto (*RAMPO*). A Rampo fan since childhood, he finally got his wish and made this super-stylish, grotesque, anachronistic period horror movie about a madman discarded at birth, returning from a pest-ridden slum to reclaim his birthright. He kills his parents and shows his prim twin brother down the garden well, leaving the him there to rot while he steals his identity.

RAMPO NOIR

(Akio Jissoji et al, 2005)

The latest Rampo adaptation may also be the greatest. Four directors, including Rampo movie veteran Akio Jissoji and Japan's most notorious pink film practitioner Hideshi Sato, are set loose on a story each. No restrictions, despite an A-list cast and very generous budget. The results are detectable: Tadanobu Asano of *Kiki* the Killer fame stumbles naked around Mars and turns into a woman; women's faces melt from looking into a deadly mirror forged by the world's biggest narcissist; a limbless war veteran is used by his wife as a toy for her freaky fetishes; a movie star chauffeur's secret crush on his employer turns artistically homicidal, but on the wrong woman. *Rampo Noir* may just be the film to revolutionize Asian horror. ☞

THE HORROR OF MALFORMED MEN

(Teruo Ishii, 1969)

This is a veritable Rampo-pourri by one of the most gleefully warped directors to ever command a Tokyo movie set, Teruo Ishii. Here you'll find human chairs, peeping toms, lusty madwomen, and resurrected twins, plus one of the country's most respected countercultural icons (punch dancer Tatsumi Hijikata) playing despot on an island populated with surgically enhanced, deformed monstrosities. Think Dr. Moreau with severe psychosexual issues. Sound good? And I didn't even mention the fireworks-with-human-body-parts scene that marks the (happy!) ending. The film is to this day banned from video and DVD release in Japan.

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Rue Morgue traces the early history of video game horror with a look at a selection of formative titles resurrected by various Internet-based emulators. Log-on and play at your own risk!

TERROR HAS BIG PIXELS

BY MATTHEW BRADFORD

Since their humble beginnings as text-based time-wasters of the early '80s, horror video games have come a long way. They've survived scores of platforms, decades of parental outrage and ever-shifting gamer appetites to become one of the most popular genres in the market. And years before console junkies were hailing original creations like *Doom* and *Resident Evil*, players pounded away at a host of fright games mostly inspired by popular horror movies.

When marketing execs realized that movie-based games come with a built-in market, they were quick to cash in on this franchising goldmine. Atari 2600 games like *Halloween* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* were among the first to prove there was more fun to be had in the gaming world than collecting pellets or jumping over barrels. And while these titles didn't always have much to offer in the way of graphics, playability and, in some cases, even similarity to the source material, their relative success

and influence paved the way for more articulated games to come.

Thanks to the Internet, enjoying these old classics has never been easier or, well, cheaper. Once upon a time, devoted retro-gamers had to scour flea markets or online auctions for older systems and games, but now hunting down that old NES classic is as simple as logging on to one of the many ROM sites (ROM being a fancy term for the game files), installing the right system emulator, and retro-gaming until your black heart's content.

Despite the murky intellectual property issues associated with the practice, there are places like consoleclassix.com which manage to stay completely legal and are ripe with old-school movie-adapted horror games just waiting to be replayed. For the veteran retro-gamer, the hunt is half the fun, but for the newbie, presented here are the best-known, often off-kilter, killer games of yesteryear.

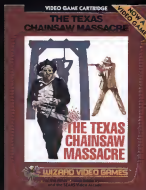
THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE (1983)

Atari 2600
Mizard Games

"Let your most wicked fantasies go wild! Know the total pleasure of destruction as you pursue your victims with the razor sharp teeth of a hungry chainsaw!" ...or not. With such a friendly description on its box, this pioneer of horror games was doomed from the start. It wasn't on shelves long before protests forced vendors to have it removed, burned, excised or similarly wiped clean from history. As a result, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is one of the rarest cartridges to track down for the deceased Atty system. In

retrospect, this might not be such a horrible thing.

Aside from suffering major control issues, the "total carnage" guaranteed by the box is non-existent. In place of gore are mono-colored victims who disappear before your chainsaw even has a chance to tickle them. Leatherface is barely recognizable and there's little deviation in scenery other than minutely different wallpapers. Odds are after the first few times you find the mighty Leatherface thwarted by a hedge,





you'll move on. TCM should be played as a reminder of how far horror gaming has evolved.

HALLOWEEN (1983) Atari 2600 Wizard Games

Play as Laurie Strode from the first two *Halloween* movies as she flexes her brain and brawn to protect the children under her care from evil incarnate Michael Myers. A giant mansion serves as the main background in which you'll have to run between two levels in an effort to find children and lead them to safety. Armed with a measly little knife, your wits (and patience) will be tested by Myers' random attacks, house-wide blackouts, and other deadly obstacles. Sporting rudimentary graphics, you won't get the same chills as you would with more modern games, but when that familiar creepy music plays and The Shape appears across the screen, the mood is adequate.

As with its *Texan* brother, *Halloween* received way too much bad hype for its content. Unlike its *Texas Chainsaw* counterpart, however, it survived the public backlash and went on to become a fun addition to the Atari library. With a simple premise and archaic graphics, *Halloween* isn't so much a fantastic discovery as a cool detour on the road of retro gaming.

FRIDAY THE 13TH (1988) NES LJN Ltd.

Ready to take on the persona of one of the most maricardian creeps in horror movie history? Eager to engage in sinful underage drinking, drugs and 8-bit premarital sex? Sorry kids, maybe next time. Instead, this watered-down

translation of Sean Cunningham's horror classic pits you against Jason Voorhees as one of six ill-fated counselors whose job it is to protect the innocent Crystal Lake campers from random axe-related attacks. With only six tries to get it right, the journey will see you combating armies of the undead, possessed wildlife and, of course, Jason. While obviously toned down for the kiddies, Friday the 13th is still worth a play, if not for its variations on the side-scrolling genre, than for the rare times it manages to get your stress-reactors firing.

JAWS (1986) NES LJN Ltd.

Grab your trusty harpoon, gas up the scow and wage war against the non-hostile aquatic life of the open seas. Trade your battle apolis (seashells) for bombs and lay waste to the dancing jellyfish army. Or, if you dare, set your sights on that shark, which doesn't so much attack you as swims around and mocks you at every dive. It's the horror classic minus the horror, fun and logic. Granted, it was no easy task for LJN to translate the psychologically-but thriller into a kiddie-oriented game, but this one, well, bites.

Save for an opening screen and the inclusion of a shark, it seems like a cheap effort to cash in on a classic. It's a guess as to whether that poorly conceived diver you control is Matt Hooper or Quint, but with no gore and minimal plot he could just as easily be David Hasselhoff on an afternoon dive. The game picks up towards the end with increased shark attacks and a face-off with the granddaddy great white, but overall *Jaws* is a dull day on the ocean.

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET (1990) NES LJN Ltd.

Likely one of the edgier titles for the popular "family system", *A Nightmare on Elm Street* pulls you into the horror saga as a teenager charged with the task of collecting Freddy's bones - scattered across various locations inspired by the movies (school, graveyard, abandoned mansion, etc.) -



and sending them back to Hell via a massive bonfire. Best of all, if you take your sweet time or die too often you'll slip into the forsaken "dream world" (a.k.a. Nintendo colour palette #2) where the disgruntled janitor himself awaits. Rest assured, progressing through waves of zombies, bats, skeletons and other cliché horror villains is definitely a challenge, and besting

Freddy - or his disembodied parts that attack at each level - is no easy task.

The pace is quick, and even the most seasoned side-scrolling veteran will find the game a worthy test of reflex and speed. On the downside, Freddy's NES adventure plays a bit on the short side and the characters aren't always easy to control. That aside, innovative level designs, multi-player options, multiple characters and an above-par soundtrack elevate what could have been a half-assed movie adaptation into a holishly playable adventure.

BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA (1992) Gameboy Sony

With graphics and a colour scheme about as diverse as *Samurai Reeves'* acting range, most gamers will likely pass on this Gameboy title, but those who give it a chance will discover an engaging side-scroller complete with a healthy dose of variety and challenge.

Released as an adaptation of Coppola's 1992 movie, this title is more or less inspired by the *Dracula* mythos in general. As lawyer-turned-vigilante Jonathan Harker, you're on a mission to kill the granddaddy of all vampires. The good fight has you romping through a number of recognizable *Dracula* haunts and besting various ghoulies in your way with an arsenal of standard sharp and blunt objects.

While the level bosses require a degree of strategy, the standard bats, rats and skeletons that populate the game are easy to fend off. That said, spikes, falls and traps ensure you don't get too cocky. Horror fans will enjoy this mild take on the bloodsucker theme, and a basic scoring system allows for replay value, but odds are you'll have had your fill of vampire quodness after one pass. It's fun, but aside from growing tired of horror lore, it does little to offer chills of its own.





ALIEN 3 (1993) SNES/Sega Genesis Acclaim

Significantly improving on earlier *Alien* releases for the Commodore 64, here's a game that not only looks great, but feels very similar to the movie experience. Gritty, tense and dark in tone — when played with the lights off and a little imagination — you might actually find yourself working up a sweat. Of course, a 16-bit model of Ripley may also have the same effect.

Obviously inspired by the third movie in the series, *Alien 3* finds a recently thawed Ripley evicting extraterrestrials on the prison colony of

Fury 161. Shoot, fly, squash and

tear up a host of creatures while saving your crew and completing various missions. Like the movie, it has a compelling sense of dread, urgency and "oh-shit" moments. Aliens have a nasty habit of scurrying in at the most inopportune times and the disorienting maze-like level designs evoke chaos. Acclaim also did a nice job of spicing up the experience with genuine sound effects and a soundtrack reminiscent of the doom and gloom overtures from the movie. Not only will fans of the film appreciate the attention to detail and cinematic cut-scenes, but the average gamer will dig the missions and fast, varied game play.

WARLOCK (1995) SNES Acclaim

The 16-bit Super Nintendo and Genesis systems brought about the age of true-to-life graphics, but they also heralded the age of "style over substance" game design. *Warlock* is one of those games which looks amazing but lacks the essential elements that would make it appealing to anyone other than fans of the movie (and are there really that many?).

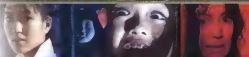
As the *Warlock*, your goal is to hunt down a number of mystical artifacts hidden throughout different places and times. Why? Who knows? At your disposal are a few choice defensive and offensive spells, one or two of which are actually helpful. *Warlock* moves like a tank compared to most of the enemies, making for unbalanced, frustrating game play, so expect to die often. To its credit, however, the graphics are excellent for the era. Settings from the pristine meadows to the bleak thunderstruck wastelands are alive and interesting (and sometimes distracting), and the movie stills and cut-scenes are ahead of their time. Julian Sands has never looked so lifelike.

Special thanks to consoleclassix.com and atarilife.com for providing their time, research and images. ☺



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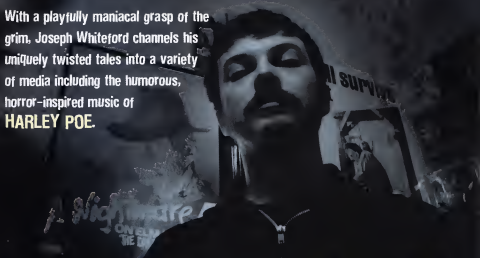
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With a playfully maniacal grasp of the grim, Joseph Whiteford channels his uniquely twisted tales into a variety of media including the humorous, horror-inspired music of **HARLEY POE.**



MINSTREL OF THE MACABRE

by DAVE ALEXANDER



Pastel pencil crayons, rhymes about downs and mandolin solos: hardly the weapons of a self-proclaimed "homicidal maniac." Unless you're Joseph Whiteford — a more sensitive kind of psycho, who's carving out a darkly tongue-in-cheek, angst-ridden niche of ghoulish drawings, poetry and music.

Not only does the 27-year-old Indiana artist illustrate his own picture books full of blade-wielding psychos, brain-hungry zombies, and various other child-hunting boogymen, he writes songs about cannibalistic transvestites, prowling vampires and serial killer boyfriends as the front man for the band Harley Poe.

"I don't think a lot of people see us so much as a 'horror' band, but a shock band," Whiteford explains. "Our subject matter is taboo with a humorous twist."

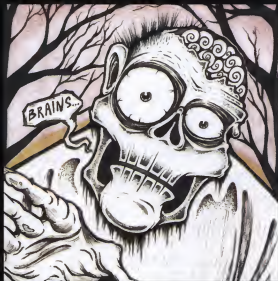
Typical lyrics might combine monsters with absurd relationship situations. For example, the opening of *Date With The Undead*, a cut from Harley Poe's debut album *In the Dark*: "You don't deserve to die this way, but if the zombies don't get you, evil men will take your innocence away/you're too sweet to be eaten alive, but if you live the world will make you insane/don't you

think it's better to die painfully than to grow up in a world of pain?"

With Whiteford as the group's founder and songwriter, Harley Poe has had a revolving membership since its inception a couple of years ago. Current players include drummer Cristian Riquelme, Kevin Phillips on Malachi bass and Adam Kerr on mandolin — a far cry from the usual heavy instruments wielded by the average band in the pages of *Rue Morgue*. Their acoustic punk-folk sound is most easily described as horror's answer to the Violent Femmes — or as Whiteford has jokingly called it, "death with a mandolin."

"We don't really dress up or use fake blood at our shows, so many horror bands are already doing that, and that's great for them, but not for us," says the diminutive musician, whose stage style is more collared shirts and jeans than mascara and a devil-lock. "We will go all-out for Halloween, but other than that we look like regular guys. But don't homicidal maniacs look like everyone else? We don't need a costume glim-mick to be evil."

Whiteford first earned a following singing and writing songs in Calibretto (originally Calibretto 13 before a member change). That band also benefited from Whiteford's manic warble and macabre



A highly cartoonish illustration included with the *Harley Poe* album in *The Dark*, and (right) art from Joseph Whiteford's upcoming book *Herschell*.

**"Don't homicidal maniacs look like everyone else?
We don't need a costume gimmick to be evil."**

JOSEPH WHITEFORD

sensibility, although when they did horror-type songs, it was with a lighter tone bolstered by organ and popper instrumentation. But the groundwork for *Harley Poe* was there. One of Calibretto's catchiest songs, *American Psycho* (off the *Dead by Dawn* album) is based on the black-comedy serial killer movie of the same name.

"I think we broke up because everyone in the band had their own idea of what it should be and we couldn't agree anymore," says Whiteford. "I especially wanted to sing about the things *Harley Poe* is inspired by: humorous and subversive lyrics inspired by the horror movies I love. Bands like the Cramps and the Tigerlilies are also great inspirations lyrically."

At the same time Whiteford was in Calibretto he was creating some of the illustrations that accompany *In the Dark*. Each of the 1500 hand-bound copies of the album contain singular illustrations representing some of the songs on the disc (*Transvestites Can Be Cannibals Too*), two-page spreads with a monster and an accompanying poem (*Dr. Sagacious and the Asylum*), plus a short story called *Bub-*

bley Brown Vs. The Evil Clown ("Just like Hannibal, Mr. Clown was a cannibal"). Whiteford lists Tim Burton, Richard Sala, Edward Gorey, and particularly Charles Addams as his influences on the work.

"The record label I'm on doesn't have too much money, so I guess the book in tandem with the CD is sort of a gimmick to help sell each other. If people don't like the one maybe they'll like the other," notes Whiteford.

This spring he plans to release another book made up of three "sanginary tales." He provides *Rue Morgue* with an exclusive sneak peek at the first one, *Herschell* (right), about a boy who's saved from one monster, only to find himself in worse trouble at the hands of another. In addition, Standard Recording Company (standardrecording.com) will release the second *Harley Poe* album, an EP called *The Dead and the Naked*, which will feature songs like *Corpses Grinding Men* and *It's Only The End Of The World*, plus ten bonus live tracks.

If it isn't already obvious, Whiteford is one multi-talented creepcore troubadour. He confirms, "I really enjoy telling horrific stories about relationships and love." ☞



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THE HILLS HAVE EYES

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Directed by Alexandre Aja
Written by Alexandre Aja,
Grégory Levasseur and Wes Craven
Fox Searchlight Pictures

Gore disciples rejoice: Alexandre Aja's remake of *The Hills Have Eyes* hits like a hot blood baptism. Of course, if you've seen his debut feature, 2003's *Haute Tension* (RM#37), this is no surprise; the French filmmaker has shown a hell of an aptitude for cinematic bodily destruction. Now, his take on Wes Craven's 1977 drive-in shocker seems determined to beat, bludgeon and burn its way to the top of the limb-heap built by recent Grue Wave horror films like *Wrong Turn*, *House of 1000 Corpses*, *The Devil's Rejects*, the *Saw* movies, *Wolf Creek* and *Hostel*.

Hills' simple plot has an all-American family on a road trip breaking down in the middle of a desolate former nuclear testing range in the New Mexico desert, where they become prey for feral mutants. From the first skull-cracking minute, Aja and co-writer Grégory Levasseur cook up a big buffet of cruelty — kidnapping, torture, rape, murder, suicide, cannibalism — disbed out by actors uglified beyond recognition under makeup, prosthetics and computer animation.

Like the aforementioned contemporary pseudo-grindhouse films, *Hills* is beautifully filthy — pulsating with vibrant earth tones and gorgeously-rendered decay. But, while these movies are light years ahead of their '70s forefathers visually, they've yet to be as thoughtful.

For example, Craven's version mirrors the two families, contrasting the all-Americans with the all-fucked-up Americans. To great effect, the film takes viewers inside the inbred brood to portray them as much a family as the interlopers. With Papa Jupiter's clan living off the land under the same wide open desert sky that symbolizes freedom in many a western, it even suggests that the



The Hills Have Eyes: Goes for the gag reflex, not the cerebral cortex.

"monsters" are living their own version of the American Dream. The original version of that film (which was first titled *Blood Relations*) ends on a shot of the two groups merging.

In Aja's version it's tough to tell just who's who in the mutant family, and Jupiter himself appears only briefly. As the director has explained (see p.16), he purposely reworked them into mysterious abominations to make them scarier. What he has is a whole gaggle of slasher types preying on city folk, which just isn't that compelling. There is some commentary about atomic weaponry and 1950s America, but it's didactic and ultimately pointless. Other than the fantastically twisted mutant base camp — a faux town designed for nuclear testing purposes — the theme is lost to sheer intensity.

No question about it, *The Hills Have Eyes* remake delivers the explicit thrills for hard horror lovers (that is, if it's not cut to death by the ratings board; we screened a pre-MPAA unrated version), but like its Grue Wave contemporaries, it's not striving for much else. In the end, it may be better to burn out than to fade away, but there's something to be said for drowning in your own blood.

Dave Alexander

IRRESPONSIBLE EXPLOITATION

KARLA

Starring Laura Prepon,
Misha Collins and Tess Harper
Directed by Joel Bender
Written by Joel Bender, Manette Rosen
and Michael D. Sellers
Quantum

The release of Joel Bender's otherwise perfunctory chiller *Karla* (a.k.a. *Deadly*) is something of an event, especially if you, like me, happen to be Canadian. Documenting the revolting sex crimes of serial school-girl-killer Paul Bernardo and his equally lethal wife Karla Homolka, the film has courted controversy here since the day it slunk itself into pre-production. That said, the only real reason for anyone to be outraged is the fact that such blood-curdling crimes have been watered down into a toothless, one-dimensional and utterly forgettable blip of a movie.

Told through the eyes of Homolka, *Karla* utilizes the barest of movie clichés, the flashback, to regurgitate ten years worth of headlines and condense them into a pal 100 minutes. We are shown the initial *Karla* (Laura Prepon: *That '70s Show*) and Paul



Karla: Laura Prepon as convicted killer Karla Homolka

(an admittedly eerie Misha Collins) encounter, followed almost immediately by their rapid descent into sexual depravity. Seems our bottle-blond anti-heroine will do almost anything for her "king" as she calls him, including drugging, raping, videotaping and killing her baby sister.

From that point on, Paul, with full acceptance if not approval from Karla, systematically rapes and terrorizes scores of women, graduating to the kidnapping, torture and eventual murder of two innocent schoolgirls. Karla of course assists in these crimes but maintains her innocence, claiming to be a battered and bullied wife — something the film relentlessly hammers home in scene after scene of bloody beatings.

Karla is a bona fide irresponsible exploitation film, but that's no reason to dismiss it outright. Prepon is an adequate actress, the movie isn't as graphic as it could have been and, let's face it, exploring misery for entertainment purposes is the lurid nature of our cultural beast. We're born rubbernecks — the same folks who sneer at the concept of a movie about the Bernardo/Homolka murders pop their penises into the newspaper box to read all the insidious details.

But *Karla* could've been a potent peek into the darkest recesses of the human psyche, an examination of self-indulgence, sexual politics, and, as twisted as it may seem, love. Instead it's just a lazy connect-the-dots movie of the week, and for that the filmmakers should be truly ashamed.

Chris Alexander

THE FOG OF WAR

R-POINT

Starring Woo-seong Kam, Byang-ho Son and Tae-kyung Oh
Written and directed by Su-chang Kong
Tartan Asia Extreme

One only has to watch the opening of *Saving Private Ryan* to understand why there isn't really a long tradition of war-horror films. There's enough terror, revulsion and gore in that beach-storming scene to out-horror most horror movies, never mind the fact that it's backed up by the weight of history. This, along with budgetary considerations, explains why the war-horror films that do get made use the war itself as only a framing device. Movies like *The Bunker*, *Deathwatch*, *Below* and *Dead Birds* tell supernatural stories that take place in isolated pockets away from the central conflict, be it in a mostly deserted bunker, a series of abandoned trenches, a submarine or a farmhouse.

Su-chang Kong's *R-Point* does the same thing but moves the setting to the Vietnam War, where a group of Korean soldiers are sent on a mission to discover the fate of a missing platoon. They arrive at the fog-shrouded R-Point and set up camp at a cavernous abandoned building that's rotting away in the middle of a field. Their patrols soon uncover an ancient temple, burial

grounds and a host of supernatural surprises, including cryptic radio transmissions and a variety of ghostly figures. As tension and paranoia build, the soldiers who don't disappear or become possessed start turning on each other. By the time the survivors decide to abandon the mission, the path back out seems to have disappeared in the mist.

R-Point isn't presenting anything new in terms of supernatural chills or war movie standards (most of the soldiers are types we've seen many times before — the coward, the new guy, the nutjob, etc.), but the combination is fresh enough, and the plot takes some dark turns. For example, when a soldier realizes the platoon he's been following through the grass isn't his own, it's an icy moment that makes the hair on the back of your neck stand at attention and salute. More importantly, though, Kong cultivates an airless atmosphere of dread into a threat that feels genuinely evil at times. Although the climax is damaged by some long-haired ghost J-horror clichés, the overall unnerving atmosphere lingers like blue smoke on the battlefield.

Dave Alexander

UNDERWORLD DEVOLUTION

UNDERWORLD: EVOLUTION

Starring Kate Beckinsale, Scott Speedman and Tony Curran
Directed by Len Wiseman
Written by Danny McBride,
Len Wiseman and Kevin Grenoux
Screen Gems Inc.

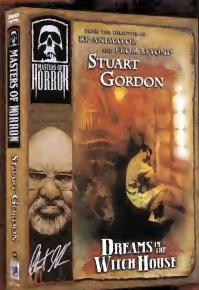
In all honesty, I pretty much loathed the first installment of Len Wiseman's kinky would-be horror epic *Underworld*. Detailing the centuries-old secret war between a legion of snotty vampires and tuggish werewolves (previously called Lycans), it's overblown action-horror vid game tripe — almost saved by the sight of Kate Beckinsale poured into black PVC. *Almost*.

That said, the apparently much anticipated follow-up, *Underworld: Evolution*, makes the prequel look like a model of restraint by comparison. Every element from the first film is blown up to mammoth, migraine-inducing proportions. The borderline incomprehensible story goes something like this: Beckinsale as super-hot renegade vamp Selene and her hybrid hunk Michael (Speedman) are on the run from both sides of the war, specifically from the CGI-rendered vamp Marcus (Curran), who also wants to release his impres-



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Underworld Evolution: Not even Beckinsale in PVC can save this sequel.

oned werewolf brother and take over the world... or something like that. Your guess is as good as mine, because this is truly one of the most incoherent, underdeveloped, needlessly over-plotted and annoyingly humourless examples of post-*Blade/Matrix* action-fantasy filmmaking ever.

Fans of the franchise are apparently enamoured by the slick steel grey/blue stylized look of the film and admittedly, the pre-credits flashback sequence that intros *Underworld: Evolution* promises something lush – an almost Mario Bava-esque blend of intentionally phony sets and demented computer-generated carnage that simply screams off the screen. Then it slinks back into the same flat monochrome matte, scowling characters and shaky-cam action sequences that defined the first film, only bigger, louder and dumb-er.

Impressively pulpy but too byper and silly to engage anyone with more than a five-second attention span, *Evolution* is tailored for mushy-headed *Buffy* fans and folks who play vampire role-playing games at goth bars. Blech!

Chris Alexander

CHEAP KILLS

GREEN RIVER KILLER

Starring George Kiseleff,
Shannon Leade and Georgina Donovan
Written and directed by Uli Lommel
Maple Pictures



After several decades in horror's where-are-they-now netherworld, former Werner Fassbinder protégé Uli Lommel (responsible for lame genre entries like

Demonsville Terror and the 1980 *Boogeyman*) returns to the genre with this micro-budget, shot-on-video entry in the serial killer docu-thriller sweepstakes. The punchline? It's not only better than most of its peers, it's also the best thing he's ever done.

Now officially the most prolific serial killer in American history, Gary Leon Ridgeway is currently serving 48 consecutive life sentences for murdering scores of women – mostly prostitutes – in and around Seattle over a period of more than twenty years. His 2001 capture and 2003 conviction generated surprisingly little interest among the general public, probably because the newly-unmasked monster wasn't nearly as charismatic as Ted Bundy, as sadistic as John Wayne Gacy, or as profoundly bonkers as Jeffrey Dahmer. Lommel nonetheless convincingly brings Ridgeway to life in one of the best serial killer flicks in recent memory, pulling no punches in depicting the murders, yet never truly wallowing in sensationalism like so many others of this ilk.

Russian-born actor George Kiseleff is superb in the title role, pouring on the menace while steadfastly resisting what must have been an overwhelming urge to chew scenery.

Granted, my endorsement isn't entirely free of caveats. The inclusion of actual police video footage of Ridgeway's interrogation may be a nifty (and unique) bonus, but it also drives home the fact that Kiseleff looks and sounds

almost nothing like the man he's playing. There's also some seemingly unintentional comic relief by way of a police detective who has a bitch of a time pronouncing the word "larynx" ("lar-nix"), and Lommel's bid for gritty realism is undermined by the presence of some suspiciously good-looking hookers.

On the commentary track the director reveals that 2006 will see his new Shadow Factory production house release *BTK Killer*, as well as *Killer Pickton*. And yes, that last one does concern Robert Pickton, the British Columbia man currently on trial for murdering dozens of women and burying them on his pig farm. Wonder if it'll generate nearly as much controversy in Canada as *Karla*?

John W. Bowen

C.H.U.D.'S RUD

CREEP

Starring Franka Potente,
Sean Harris and Vas Blackwood
Written and directed by Christopher Smith
Maple Pictures



C.H.U.D.s, as anyone who's seen the 1984 film knows, are Cannibalistic Humanoid Underground Dwellers. The British flick *Creep* has exactly one cannibalistic humanoid underground dweller. His name's Craig (Harris), and he lives in the labyrinthine tunnels and corridors of London's subway system. Technically, Craig's a horribly disfigured human, but rest assured, he's just as mean

and sneaky as your average subterranean flesh-chugging pseudo-person.

For his first feature, writer/director Christopher Smith goes for atmosphere over plausibility, creating a story that strings together a bunch of highly unlikely but often effective scare scenarios. To buy into the plot you're going to have to believe that in London – one of the largest cities in the world – someone could fall asleep momentarily on a bench, miss the last train of the night, become locked in a fully camera-equipped station, fail to get help from the only security person on duty, and then be stalked by a murderous freak who's grown up in the underground after being abandoned there by doctors who were performing some sort of nefarious experiments... in the fringe "subway system".

Kate, the astronomically unlucky lass in question, is played by Franka Potente – best known as the star of *Run Lola Run*. You can't help but feel she's kinda slumming it here as a typical slasher heroine who's sometimes incredibly tough and resourceful, and at

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Creep: A subterranean slasher flick big on thrills but small on brains.

other times a screaming nurod, depending on whether the plot needs her to cleverly escape the killer or foolishly turn her back on him.

Creep's a far cry from Gary Sherman's legendary film about a mutant killer in the London subway tunnels, *Raw Meat*, but still watchable due to a brisk pace and set pieces like the room where the killer tortures his victims in partially submerged cages (submerged in sewage no less!), and the filthy *Saw*-like operating room where he practices his own brand of creatively ruthless surgery. Despite his average name, Craig is indeed a disgusting, nasty little fucker, and it's in those cruel and grisly scenes that the film earns its title.

Dave Alexander

DEATH BY JUNK

THE MANGLER REBORN

Starring Weston Blakesley,
Scott Speiser and Aimee Brooks
Written and directed by Melt Cunningham
and Eric Gardner
Lions Gate Home Entertainment

If Stephen King were dead, he'd be rolling around in his grave. The man's work has been bastardized by so many untalented filmmakers it's not funny anymore, and *The Mangler Reborn* is no exception. (Disclosure: I haven't seen *The Mangler* or *The Mangler 2*. But finding a *Mangler* fan on our

staff... well, it would have been easier finding a fan of rectal cancer.)

Hadley (Blakesley) is a fix-it man possessed by *The Mangler*, an evil laundry machine responsible for several deaths years earlier. He's bought the thing at an auction, pieced it back together, and promptly kills his wife with a mallet at its behest. He then starts kidnapping his customers, dragging them home and feeding them to the machine. But a father and son break-and-enter team (Speiser and *Phantom* star Reggie Bannister) stumble onto the booby-trapped house and the victims imprisoned within. Mallet murder after mallet murder follows as Hadley feeds the machine and dines upon the victims' rendered remains before the Grand Gutsyol-style climax.

Gorehounds get their fix late in the flick as the machine (a cheesy collection of knives and scissors we never get a good look at) does its work and our heroine ends up blood-spattered. But we have to wait through long stretches of dull exposition and unimaginative violence before we get to the gae.

Truly the only fun to be had here is playing spot-the-influence. Cunningham and Gardner cheekily reference *Reino Iron Man*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Hate Tenion* in their script — a ploy which only serves to point out their own work's dullness. Even the gratuitous nudity struck me as distasteful and exploitive. Really, it makes one long for another *Children of the Corn* sequel.

Sean Plummer

Graham Sibley in *Zombie Honeymoon*.

DEADED BLISS

ZOMBIE HONEYMOON

Starring Tracy Coogan, Graham Sibley
and Tonya Cornelisse
Written and directed by David Gebroe
Showtime Entertainment

Fifty percent of US marriages end in divorce. The rest end in death. Seeing what happens to the newlyweds in *Zombie Honeymoon*, it's hard to decide which is preferable. After all, it's the rare divorce in which "irreconcilable differences" stem from zombification.

Enter Denise (Coogan) and Danny (Sibley), madly-in-love newlyweds honeymooning at the New Jersey shore (!). While lying on the beach, Danny is attacked by a zombie and pronounced dead, but then makes a miraculous recovery. But he's far from OK, as Denise finds out when she discovers him chowing down on a neighbour. Worse: when she invites friends over for a weekend visit, Danny realizes that not attacking them is easier said than done. Despite his newfound hunger, however, he struggles to retain his



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THE WILLS HAVE TWIGS

EVIL BREED: THE LEGEND OF SAMHAIN

Starring Brandi-Ann Milbradt, Ginger Lynn Allen and Bobbie Philips
Written and directed by Christian Viel
Lions Gate Films

Back in 2002 when this exploitation take on the Sawney Bean legend (see p.21) was being shot just outside of Montreal, Quebec, and was originally titled *Samhain*, it generated buzz on the Internet because Canuck director Christian Viel had cast a bunch of porn actresses in lead roles and was promising gorehounds a blood-and-boob-fest like no other.

But then distributors got cold feet because of the copious cocktail of sex and gore, and it was shelved until Lions Gate had the — ahem — balls to pick it up. Curiously, in this day and age of unrated director's cuts, they still circumcised it, and what eventually got slapped together for release is a hackneyed mess that's hard to follow and even harder to swallow.

The retitled and restocked *Evil Breed: The Legend of Samhain* features a group of college students and their chaperone who travel to Ireland to learn about Celtic and Druidic traditions. Upon arrival they're told about Bean, a "real" 15th century Scottish madman (in Ireland?) whose family of inbred cannibals captured and feasted on wayward travellers. Legend dictates that though the family was burned at the stake for their bad tastes, one of the Bean clan escaped and his descendants are, in fact, alive and chomping on tourists in the nearby countryside. It's not long before a disfigured mutant comes a calling.

Brandi-Ann Milbradt as virginal college girl Shae turns in the only competent performance, mainly because she's surrounded by incompetent porn stars cum (heh!) actors like Ginger Lynn (*The Devil's Rejects*, *New Wave Hookers 8*), Chasey Lain (*Demon Knight*, *Monsters of Cock*) and Taylor Hayes (*Squiraling Anal All Star 2*, *Ass-gasm*). Even though Queen Bee porn icon Jenna Jameson has her name, face and breasts plastered all over the cover, her actual screen time totals about four minutes. That said, the scene in which a cannibal cuts her chest open and doesn't know what to do with her silicone breast implant almost makes the whole rotten mess somewhat worthwhile.

For a public apology and explanation from the director (where he claims the ending of the film was shot by others, including a "drunken DP"), see the comments section for the film at imdb.com.

Last Chance Lance



humanity and morality, and at all costs keep his marriage together.

Zombie Honeymoon isn't your typical zombie movie though, it's a horror romance. There are few surprises in the plot, but that's not so important because the deft touch that writer/director David Geboe applies to the details keeps both of the characters and the audience emotionally vulnerable. He sheds zombie movie expectations by focusing on the period between the attack and transformation, allowing the couple a window of wedded bliss before Denise makes the grisly discovery about her hubby and tries to come to terms with it. As a result, the unravelling of her dreams becomes all the more painful, and by the time the blood spurts at the film's satisfying, gory climax, Denise is so damaged that she's willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for love.

The film, which was produced through Larry (*Windigo*) Fessenden's Glass Eye Pix, is reminiscent of *An American Werewolf in London* in its mix of transformation drama, black comedy and outright gore — although it's done on a much, much smaller budget, which is painfully apparent during some bad (but forgivable) audio syncing. So maybe love really does conquer all, or at least the desire for brassminness.

Sam Costello

HO-NO NUM

SANTA'S SLAY

Starring Bill Goldberg,
Douglas Smith and Robert Culp
Written and directed by David Steiman
Maple Pictures

Hello *Mary Lou*, *Prom Night 2*, *Ginger Snaps 2* and *Ginger Snaps 3*. And now joining that proud heritage of Edmonton-shot fright flicks is *Santa's Slay*, a holiday horror-comedy unlikely to put this writer's home city on the genre map. It probably won't propel star Bill Goldberg into the movie limelight either. Considering the amount of acting he's done as a professional wrestler in the WWE, you'd think he could squeeze out a more spirited performance as a cartoonishly evil Santa.

The film opens with him bursting through a chimney and granting one-liners as he kills a family, played by the likes of Fran Drescher, Chris Kattan, Rebecca Gayheart and James Caan — all undoubtedly roped into it by executive producer Brett Ratner, whose directing credits include the 2002 *Silence of the Lambs* prequel *Red Dragon*. Then it's off to the town of Hell, where Nicholas (Smith) and his eccentric inventor grandfather (Culp) live together. When evil Santa shows up to cut a swath through the locals (including SCTV alummus Dave Thomas as a sleazy preacher), grandpa opens a dusty old tome and tells Nicholas the real story of Christmas. In an inspired bit done in the Rankin/Bass style of stop-motion animation (*Mad Monster Party*), we learn that Santa is really evil but was forced to play nice for 1000 years after losing a bet.

But that millennium of goodwill is up and he's back to raise hell with his buffalo-drawn sleigh, Christmas ornament hand grenades and mad wrestling skills. Grandpa, Nicholas and his girlfriend must escape the wrath of Killer Claus while figuring out a way to vanquish his annoying ass. *Leprechaun*-grade levels of ridiculousness ensue.

On that level of intentional cinematic idiocy — one-liners, silly props and comedic kills — *Santa's Slay* is better than a lump of coal. Some of the gags work (including an exploding present that decapitates some brats), but most of the time the film just tries too hard.



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Morella is a 100-year-old vampire who's only three kills away from becoming the Queen of the Vampires when she drains her 10,000th victim. Her two vampire-stripper assistants, brilliantly named Sugar and Soyce, lure victims back to her love palace for fangy foreplay and dinner. Hot on their hot tails is vampire hunter Ivan (Phil Fondacaro: *Land Of The Dead*, *Blood Dolls*), the only actor to bring any professionalism to the movie, who is unfortunately overshadowed by one of director Charles Band's retarded puppets – a horny hominid named Marvin who gets more tail than all of the humans combined. Like most of Band's movies, this is a fun time-waster which begs the question: what does Full Moon Charlie do with all those puppets at night?

Body Count: 6

Strip Sessions: 5



SILICONE STAKE-STOPPERS

VAMPS: DEADLY DREAMGIRLS

El Cinema

Vamps is a strip bar run by female vampires who use it as both a feeding ground and recruiting centre to increase their deadly numbers. When Father Seamus, a priest and collector of vampire movie memorabilia (1), visits the club with one of his buddies, he falls for a stripper named Heather and tries to save her from the clutches of the owner and head vampire, Tasha (Jenny Wallace: *Hookers In A Haunted House*). The ensuing battle between good and evil is laughable but thankfully chock full of sexy silicone-enhanced sirens who will have you stuffing dollar bills into your DVD player. Worth a watch just for what may be the first death-by-plunger scene in movie history.

Body Count: 7

Strip Sessions: 11



BLOODSUCKING BOMBOS BITE BACK

VAMPS 2: BLOOD SISTERS

El Cinema

For everyone kept awake at night wondering whether a relationship between a vampire stripper and an ex-priest could flourish, the answer lies in the sequel to *Vamps: Deadly Dreamgirls*. Apparently the answer is yes, because the two are doing better than ever. Heather is knocked-up and most of the original cast returns to celebrate a special Christmas at the Vamps strip club. But the party ends early when vampires show up to kill the couple before the baby can be born and a secret prophecy is fulfilled. Unfortunately, the poorly-shot and audio distortion plagued *Vamps 2* pales in comparison to the original, despite a scene where a guy toasts marshmallows over the burning corpse of a vampire babe left out in the sun. Mmmm... Scrilicious!

Body Count: 10

Strip Sessions: 7



First time writer/director Steiman just doesn't get nasty or weird enough to hit the mark he aims for.

But don't despair fellow Edmontonians – at least we'll always have those '80s Stanley Cup memories. Go Oilers!

Dave Alexander

A JAPANESE LOLITA

LE PORTRAIT DE PETITE COSSETTE

Starring the voices of Manna Inoue, Mitsuko Salga and Kumiko Yokote
Directed by Akiyuki Shinbo
Written by Mayori Sekijima
Genre: Animation

Gothic Lolita is a fashion and lifestyle trend that has swept across Japan and spawned numerous clothing catalogues and manga titles. The idea of dressing up in goth and Victorian-era clothing while living in one of the most heavily industrialized and technologically advanced nations has been embraced by schoolgirls, so it was only a matter of time before it arrived in the world of anime.



This task fell to director Akiyuki Shinbo (*The Light of the Dark Master*), who with the help of screenwriter Mayori Sekijima (*Soul Taker*) tells the story of Eiri, a young student who looks after an antique shop in downtown Tokyo. One day while unpacking a Venetian glass, he's amazed to discover a reflection staring up at him – a girl named Cossette who lived in France 250 years ago. Eiri falls in love, but their romantic interlude is soured when he has a vision of her brutal murder at the hands of a man who was painting her portrait. The glass which had once belonged to Cossette had witnessed her murder and now holds a grudge which has tied down her soul. She must entice Eiri into performing a blood pact which will free her – but only if he dies horribly.

Thankfully *Cossette* isn't just big eyes and flashing panty shots; there's actually substance to this title in beautifully-rendered backgrounds so intricately detailed they're almost photo-real. The look and feel of classical 18th century art is captured perfectly, and there was an obvious labour of love in animating the costumes. It isn't all bustles and bows, though. Aside from Cossette's disemboweling, there's also blood-drinking, dolls bleeding from their eyes and a brutal crucifixion. All three episodes, totalling 110 minutes, are packaged with cast interviews, artwork and a music video on this release. Ideal for the gloomy Japanese schoolgirl in all of us.

Last Chance Lance

Last Chance Lance

CINEMA CAIRE PRESENTS

After 25 years of relative obscurity, the low-budget killer kid flick *The Children* comes back to bite us on DVD.

TOXIC TYKES

by Last Chance Lance and Dave Alexander

A bus full of school kids passes through a virulent cloud of nuclear waste, transforming its occupants into radioactive rug rats with black fingernails and the ability to kill with a noxious embrace. The town sheriff discovers that the only way to stop 'em is to kill 'em by cutting off their hands — making for one helluva parental dilemma. Despite the unforgettable premise, most horror fans have never heard of *The Children* (a.k.a. *The Children of Ravensback*), which was recently rescued from the video delete bin by Troma.

When the movie made its debut back in 1980, it was riding the wave of a movie market invigorated by a slew of late-'70s horror classics, but soon faded into the shadow of *Friday the 13th*, which was released the same year. Unlike *Friday*, which has been victims killed for drinking, having premenstrual sex and getting high, *Children* producer/writer Carlton J. Albright explains that his film doesn't have such a moralistic tone.

"As we were making the film, Three Mile Island happened," Albright tells Rue Morgue, referring to the nuclear power plant disaster near Middletown, Pennsylvania, on March 28, 1979, at the time, it was the most serious meltdown in US commercial nuclear power plant operating history. "I wasn't preaching about [the dangers of nuclear energy], if you do a horror film, the worst thing that you can do is preach. You just let that be part of the unfolding story and for those that are smart enough, they take that away if they want to."

Ironically, much of the crew that made *The*

Children went on to make *Friday the 13th*, notably composer Harry Manfredini, who carved out a career scoring horror movies like *House* (and both of its sequels), *The Hills Have Eyes 2*, *Zombie Island Massacre* and eight of the *Friday* sequels.

"[Harry] invited me to the screening of *Friday the 13th*," Albright recalls, "and afterwards he asked me what I thought of the music, and I said, 'Harry, you're a goddamned thief! You stole from yourself!' That's what he did; if you listen to the two scores they're very, very, very similar."

Although moderately successful in grindhouse theatres, *The Children* eventually developed its own cult following on home video. Fans embraced its low-budget special effects (including bloody mannequin hands) and murder scenes, which are often simultaneously funny and unsettling in their taboo-breaking celebration of child killing.

"It presents something interesting where parents raise their children and they're supposed to be protective," Albright explains, "But then the kids go into this nuclear accident and when they come back they're seeking out their parents, and when they put their hands on them they're turning them into eggplant parmesan. So many women have come up to me — women who have children — who knew exactly what the underlying

message of this was: that children can suffocate and kill you if they get their hands on you."

With an admirably nasty spin on the horror of child-rearing, eventually *The Children* earned enough admirers that it spawned a stage musical, which was developed in the late '90s by a couple of NYU students. With over twenty original songs, Albright describes it as "absolutely hilarious."

Clips of the musical, interviews with the film's cast and crew, and some behind-the-scenes featurettes are extras on Troma's 25th anniversary DVD release of the film. The original distributor has long been out of business, and a complete print was tough to find, so sadly, the scratchy non-widescreen presentation looks like it passed through Lloyd Kaufman's colon.

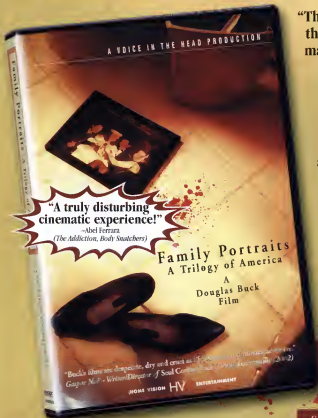
Albright notes that they were

only able to finally commit the film to disc when a missing reel was provided by a film club in the Western US.

Although it may never spawn a sequel or a remake, *The Children* still packs a punch, and Albright — who also wrote and directed the cult classic *Luther the Geek* (RMM47) in 1990 — says the renewed attention just might be enough to inspire him to make another bizarre but fearless little horror movie. He admits, "I am [hoping] to find something that will push my buttons."



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INDIE TERROR FEST!

BY STUART ANDREWS

THIS INSTALLMENT: SPOTLIGHT ON MEXICAN FILMMAKER AARON SOTO

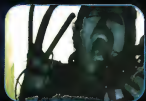
For award-winning Tijuana-based indie filmmaker Aaron Soto, growing up in Mexico as a horror movie fanatic was often a frustrating affair.

"Mexico is a really weird country," he explains, "because in one way, it's okay to have a culture of the supernatural and it's okay to have a TV show where they teach you witchcraft and how to kill your husband, but it's not okay to show horror movies." Soto continues, explaining that in Tijuana "nota roja" magazines – which exploit the "craziest and goriest photos imaginable" of accidents and deaths – are available to children. But conversely, making horror films in Mexico is a difficult business.

Soto – who as an adult created several imaginative horror shorts including *Omega Shell* and *Hueso* – was raised on that revered staple of sombrero horror, the El Santo wrestling epic, but it was a trip to his father's library at the age of seven that sparked a deepening curiosity with the genre and an intense longing to be a filmmaker.

"I found a copy of *Alejandro Jodorowsky's El Topo: A Book of the Film*," Soto relays. "I didn't understand it at all but I fell in love with the images. That book gave me the sense that movies were more than entertainment, that movies were an art form. So I grew up trying to get the Jodorowsky movies which were really hard to find, even in Mexico. That's why I became a filmmaker: to find the thing that I was looking for."

Taking advantage of Tijuana's close proximity to San Diego, in his developing years Soto availed himself of a wide array of horror films not easily attainable in his native land. By the age of fifteen, he had amassed a massive collection of VHS titles that boasted seminal works from such masters of the macabre as Lynch, Cronenberg, Argento and Fulci.



Omega Shell is Soto's cyberpunk spaghetti western

Soto's lifelong passion for genre filmmaking finally exploded onto the screen in 2000 with his first short, *Omega Shell* – a cyberpunk spaghetti western that details the exploits of a lone desperado and his maniacal, mechanical sex apparatus. Unfolding in a stark, desolate landscape and steeped in the symbol-laden mysticism of *El Topo* and the technophobic nightmares of *Videodrome* and *Tetsuo*, and adding the insanely kinetic camera work of *The Evil Dead*, Soto's debut is an evocative and intensely frenetic celebration of the genre films he adores.

He went on to produce a number of award-winning follow-up films but it's the 2005 short, *Hueso* (a collaborative effort with fellow filmmaker Cathy Alberich), that most fully demonstrates Soto's potential as a formidable and unique genre talent. Alberich is best known for her short *Color Drip*, which depicts a woman's mouth in extreme close-up sampling a wide array of differing food items. It is a sensual, organic film that explodes with vibrant colour and sexual playfulness.

"What we like about *Hueso* is that it's about isolated people," says Soto. "In Mexico it's hard to be isolated because there's so many people, but if you're a genre filmmaker you're definitely psychologically isolated. Everyone loves norteño music and football but nobody likes horror

movies. So we relate to being isolated as children and not being able to identify with anyone else."

With *Hueso*, Alberich's intense awareness of colours and textures blends perfectly with Soto's meditative and brooding atmosphere to tell the haunting and somewhat disturbing tale of a young girl who cannot connect with reality and so withdraws into her own private realm where she cuts up dead crows and plays with the bones as if they were dolls. Told without a single line of dialogue, *Hueso* is an incredibly photographed, intensely contemplative, unconventional narrative that promises much from this highly effective creative collaboration.

The duo are currently preparing to shoot their first feature, based on a true story and set in a cemetery in Mexico City. If they succeed in translating the potency of their uniquely stylized shorts to feature-length proportions, Aaron Soto and Cathy Alberich will undoubtedly become household names to legions of horror fanatics everywhere.

A collection of Aaron's Soto's short films are available to order by emailing him at: cine-maine@yahoo.com. And for more information, visit their production company Escandalos Films at escandalosfilms.blogspot.com.

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THE HORROR OF PARTY BEACH

THE HORROR OF PARTY BEACH (1964)

A tossed-overboard barrel of chemical waste seeps into the marrow of deepsea skeletons mutating them into blood-hungry beasts that terrorize the ramblers and rebels shaking and shimmying on the stinky sands of Party Beach. Full uncut blood-dripping edition! Look out, here comes Eulabelle!

THE CURSE OF THE LIVING CORPSE (1964)

Ignoring warnings set forth in the family patriarch's will, the dubious relatives fight, bicker and squabble as they're picked off one by one in most gruesome manners in this tale of mystery and woe. Features the debut role of Roy Scheider (Jaws, The French Connection) and the only other film role of Candace Hillgoss, the frail ingenue from Herk Harvey's Carnival of Souls.

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- Anamorphic Widescreen 1.78:1
- English Subtitles

THE CURSE OF THE LIVING CORPSE

DEL TENNEY DOUBLE FEATURE



Violent Midnight

VIOLENT MIDNIGHT (1963)

A trench-coated black-gloved killer stalks a college campus in this stark black and white thriller. Features the debut film of James Farentino (The Final Countdown, Dead & Buried) and Dick Van Patten (Eight is Enough) with additional screen burning from Jean Hale (In Like Flint) and Sylvia Miles (Midnight Cowboy, Andy Warhol's Heat).

SPECIAL FEATURES:

- Commentary with Del Tenney
- Photo Gallery
- Theatrical Trailers

DVD SPECS:

- Dolby 2.0 Mono
- English Subtitles
- 4:3

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CINEMACABRE PRESENTS

ABBREVIATED TERRORS

THIS INSTALLMENT: UNDEAD SHORTS FROM THE GREAT WHITE NORTH

BY STUART ANDREWS

With Hollywood studio monstrosities like George A. Romero's *Land of the Dead*, the dreadful *Dawn of the Dead* remake and the critically slaughtered *Resident Evil: Apocalypse* having all been lensed north of the 49th parallel, it appears as though Canada has emerged as the unlikely epicentre of a zombie film resurrection. With recent maple syrup-soaked feature-length entries into the cannibalistic cadaver canon such as

Graveyard Alive (RME50) and the forthcoming *Fido* (to be released theatrically by Lions Gate Films this Halloween), along with a spate of highly unconventional zombie shorts, Canadians have proved that, by delving into some unusual facets and unexplored tangents, there are still a few twitches left in the death nerve of this moribund subgenre.

ZOMBIE BUSINESS

16 mins/volatileworks.org

Montreal filmmaker Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare takes the tradition of the zombie film as overt social commentary to a whole new level. In *Zombie Business*, a man suffering a mindless, automaton middle-class existence is plagued with nightmares as the prevailing social order is threatened by the rise of a zombified, flesh-eating underclass.

Shot on Super 8 and appropriating an elegant, sepia-toned silent film aesthetic, DeGiglio-Bellemare's simple narrative belies an utterly complex, intellectually exhausting political subtext that can best be described as George A. Romero meets Noam Chomsky. The title refers to a phrase that surfaced in the 1980s to describe the dubious system of Reaganomics. This is just one of a number of examples where DeGiglio-Bellemare explores the oblique connections between horror movie conventions and the language of revolutionary politics. The film begins with a quote from Karl Marx that could easily have been the tagline for *Night of the Living Dead*: "The traditions of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."

As much a political satire and experimental film as it is a horror movie, *Zombie Business* functions as an almost intellectually impenetrable PhD thesis on film that is definitely not for casual fans of the genre. But in a world of endless, unimaginative rereads, credit must go to DeGiglio-Bellemare for pretty much defying all known perceptions of what a zombie movie entails. Clearly one of Canada's most unique genre filmmakers.



ONE HOT ROTTING ZOMBIE LOVE SONG

8 mins/stolenbicycle@sympatico.ca

Jonas is a nasty, horrible, flesh-eating punk fuck whose nightly exploits find him breaking into the homes of beautiful women to feast upon their delicious young brains. Many would consider this to be the ideal on-lifestyle for a cold-blooded, young zombie male, but not Jonas. The problem is, he's grown despondent with the taste of the human hypothalamus and longs for a vegetarian diet and the pursuit of

his dream as a sickeningly sensitive, limp-dick singer/songwriter (à la John Mayer).

One Hot Rotting Zombie Love Song is a clever little tale that not only explores the shortcomings of the zombie social scene but is also a technically impressive and cinematically competent effort that's made with a real reverence for the genre and filled with inventive visual gags and great makeup effects. Currently working on a full-length version of this short, writer/director Christophe Davidson is undoubtedly destined for a feature filmmaking career.

ZOMBIE GIRLFRIEND

11 mins/www.zedlecher.com

Shot just steps away from the old Rue Morgue Mansion in Toronto on a shoestring budget of \$425 Canadian, *Zombie Girlfriend* is, by far, the least sophisticated production of the three films but quite possibly the most effective. When a man is stuck babysitting his newly zombified girlfriend as he awaits the arrival of the overburdened and backlogged Zombie Removal Services task force, he attempts every trick in the book to put an end to her salivating shenanigans. After repeatedly shooting her in the head with a .45 and bashing her skull in with a hammer, the shub (played effectively by director/professional comedian Pete Zedlecher himself) finds it progressively very difficult to resist his drinking, Jonas's attempts to pull him into

her world of quiet, zombie domestication.

Zombie Girlfriend is not only a demanded romp through some seriously deranged splatterstick zombie madness, it's also an innovative use of the subgenre as a highly effective metaphor to explore the battle of the sexes, the conflicting needs between men and women and the inevitable breakdown in communication that ensues. **A**



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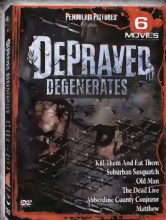
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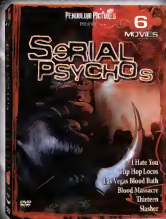
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REISSUES



Don't Go in the House: Burned bodies return to haunt a sadistic killer in this pseudo-slasher.

A CHARRED LIFE

DON'T GO IN THE HOUSE (1980)

Starring Dan Grimaldi, Robert Dath and Ruth Dardick
Directed by Joseph Ellison
Written by Joseph Ellison, Ellen Hammiel and Joseph Masfield
Shrek Show/Media Blasters

Hot stuff coming through! The flame-happy turn-of-the-decade shocker *Don't Go in the House* really hasn't aged particularly well, but if you can get past its disco-era crimes against fashion and music — not to mention its spiteful portrayal of women — you'll find a passable pseudo-slasher that gives new meaning to the term "Disco Inferno."

The film begins as fire-shy Donny (Grimaldi) arrives home to find that his beloved but domineering moth-

er has passed away. He's upset, but can't shake the memories of how she used to hold his arms over the kitchen stove elements as a childhood punishment. Once over his initial grief, he lets his mom rot away in her favourite chair while he plays his Bee Gees records as loud as he wants. But instead of taking advantage of his newfound independence by burning up the dance floor at the nearby boogie bar, Donny lines his walls with sheet metal, and uses his trusty flame-thrower to charbroil a bevy of local girls.

Don't Go in the House is a fairly standard but still effective psychological slasher. Although the script's wrist-burning trauma isn't really convincing enough to drive poor Donny into Norman Bates-land, future *Sopranos* star Dan Grimaldi is talented enough to distract viewers from the barely there plot. He nails the part, making poor Donny a believable and well-rounded headcase with off-kilter dialogue, a self-depre-

cating demeanor and, perhaps most perverted of all, an undying love for that thumping disco beat.

Though well staged, the film's much-discussed torching scenes are pretty grim; Donny douses the girls with gasoline as they hang naked from the ceiling in chains. In fact, it makes you wonder about writer/director Ellison's own upbringing. Still, he gives the film a smoldering atmosphere of dread — especially when Donny imagines charred corpses moving through the shadows.

While the misogynistic overtones are about as obvious and abrasive as asbestos bell bottoms, *Don't Go in the House* at least tries to make up for its mean streak with better-than-average acting and effects, plus an eerie tone. And, unlike the rest of the movie, these are strong horror film elements that will never go out of style.

Paul Corupe

MESSY METROPOLIS


SLIME CITY (1988)

Starring Robert C. Sabin, Mary Huner and Dick Biel
Written and directed by Greg Lamberson
Retro Shock-O-Rama

On your next journey to Tromaville you might want to stop over at Slime City, a place stuck permanently in the splatterfest '80s, where grisly goop, glue and gallons of gunk flood the landscape. Originally released in 1988, *Slime City* quickly became a cult favourite in the grindhouse circuit and saw a limited video release. Although its distributor went tits up, the film went on to garner a certain amount of fame as an underground bootleg.

Robert C. Sabin stars as Alex, a student settling into a new apartment complex populated by weirdos who are part of cult trying to resurrect their dead leader. While spending his time trying to get between the legs of his frigid girlfriend Lori (Huner), Alex is seduced by the scantily-clad goth girl across the hall (also played by Huner). After being served some green slime he thinks is a Himalayan yogurt developed by an alchemist who used to live in the building, he wakes up covered in a clear coating of goop and discovers he has to kill people to make it vanish. The movie culminates in an over-the-top battle between Lori and a completely slime-soaked Alex who's desperate to kill her.





Those movies were for pussies.

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TERRIBLE TWEENS

DON'T DELIVER US FROM EVIL (1970)

Starring Jeanne Goupil, Catherine Wagener and Michel Robin
Written and directed by Joël Séria
Mondo Macabre

The successful and enduring exploitation horror film is a delicate ballet: shocking the shit out of you by showing the un-showable while also giving you — however meagre — dollops of food for thought. Joël Séria's outstanding "lost" 1970 religio-sleazy *Don't Deliver Us From Evil* is one of the finest examples of a video nasty with more on its mind than boobs, bums and blood. With its pulse-pounding blend of Catholic blasphemy, winking violence and dirty sexuality, this dark melodrama is guaranteed to knock you on your ass while you stroke your chin and nod.

Little Anne is a thirteen-year-old Catholic schoolgirl with wide eyes, a cherubic smile and a hankering to raise Hell. With her equally corrupt girlfriend Lore, she embarks on an odyssey of depravity and personal destruction, first outing a lesbian nun, then poisoning the village idiot's pet canary. These two un-heavenly creatures proceed to off the deep end entirely, sexually tormenting and burning down the house of their gardener, writing satanic verses, and eventually murdering a horny hitchhiker. Meanwhile, their blissfully ignorant parents look away, safe in the erroneous knowledge that their sweetie-pie daughters are good little girls blindly serving God.

Don't Deliver Us From Evil disturbs by inserting these morally ambiguous children into scenes of graphic sexuality that are intended to both outrage and titillate. The graphic near-rape scene almost had me dialling the cops until I found out that the young actresses were in fact just shy of 20. Surprisingly, however, it wasn't the pre-pubescent sex that got this sucker banned. In the early '70s (and indeed, even today), any anti-Catholic sentiments were frowned upon in French pop culture and seeing as the film's absolutely ripe with these theologically venomous themes, the picture barely saw the light of day.

Thanks once again to fearless dirty movie defenders Mondo Macabre, this slick little classic is now widely available on DVD in stunning, completely uncut form. It's undoubtedly scotching of a blasphemous masterpiece and those easily offended are well advised to steer clear.

Ben Cortman



Okay, so the story's not so great, but where the plot fails, the special effects take off with cartoon gore reminiscent of movies like *Basket Case* and *Street Trash* (RMP#50). Meat cleaver decapitations, spilled guts, and crawling brains abound with sickening but laughable results.

Slime City is available through El Cinema's vintage horror label Retro Shock-O-Rama in a 1.78:1 widescreen transfer with a making-of featurette, a commentary where Lamberson admits to his lack of directing skills, and a lame extra called *Naked Fear*, which was also directed by Lamberson and features Sabin as an agoraphobic shut-in who ends up living with a twisted serial killer.

Next stop *Slime City*; remember to wear a bib.

Last Chance Lance

FRUSTRATION IN THE ART HOUSE

BUDDY BOY (1959)

Starring Aidan Gillen, Emmanuelle Seigner and Susan Tyrrell
Written and directed Mark Hanton
Image Entertainment

To the point: *Buddy Boy*, a dark drama written and directed by rookie Mark Hanton, is decidedly all style over substance. It makes almost no sense whatsoever and borrows liberally from the tone of Lynch's *Eraserhead* and the visuals of Polanski's *Repulsion*. But if you know all this going in, there's fun to be had with this arty, weirdo indie feature.

Aidan Gillen plays Francis, a stuttering, religiously devout introvert who spends his days working in a photo lab, caring for his abrasive, alcoholic stepmother (Tyrrell), and spying on his beautiful neighbor Gloria (Seigner). After Francis saves Gloria from a purse snatcher, the two develop an unlikely relationship where she's the sexual aggressor and he becomes weirder than ever — even breaking into her apartment and threatening her with a weapon doesn't put an end to their romance. In the meantime, he continues his peeping Tom activities and witnesses Gloria eating raw, possibly human, meat, even though she claims to be a vegan.

Make no mistake, *Buddy Boy* is full of subplots and twists that are never explained (including one involv-



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A SHARKSPLORATION GEM

CYCLONE (1978)

Starring Hugo Stiglitz, Andrés García and Olga Karlatos

Directed by René Cardona Jr.

Written by René Cardona Jr.

and Carlos Valdemar

Synapse Films



Following in the footsteps of his equally underrated filmmaker father, late Mexican schlock director René Cardona Jr. dedicated his professional life to creating unique and eccentric exploitation pictures. From the sickening and silly *The Night of a Thousand Cats*, to the gory, pre-*Alive* Andes cannibalism tale *Survival*, to the creepy and seedy Jonestown Massacre-inspired *Guyana: Cult of the Damned*, Cardona Jr. proved he had a knack for both straight-up sleaze and sleazy disaster rip-offs. *Cyclone*, released briefly in the US as *Terror Storm*, is one of his best – a vulgar and unsettling film that answers the question, “What if H.G. Lewis and Irwin (The Towering Inferno) Allen remade *Jaws*?”

Following the minor international success of his previously released sex ‘n’ shark potboiler *Tintorera*, Cardona Jr. found a way to reuse his impressive man-eater footage and crossbreed it with the heart-rending human drama of *Survivor* to maximum nail-biting, stomach-churning effect.

Cyclone tells the story of a violent storm that rips through the Caribbean, yanking planes from the sky, submerging villages and screwing up the tides but good. A group of tourists on a sightseeing cruise get stranded at sea, losing contact with the mainland. As days pass and water supplies decrease, morale shrinks and hunger swells. Eventually the desperate survivors are forced (in the film’s most upsetting sequence) to kill, skin and eat the pet poo-dle of one of the tourists. The sun-fried mutt proves unsubstantial, and finally they’re forced to dine on each other... and then the sharks come and things get really nasty.

Like much of Cardona Jr.’s output, *Cyclone* is a tense, uncomfortable, and thoroughly entertaining flick that utilizes a very natural cinema vérité approach, one that was far ahead of its time. Unfortunately for him (but fortunately for us), his leering, sensational presentation of sloppy violence ghettoized him as a lowbrow hack. One look at the direct and involving *Cyclone* proves this is not the case; the man clearly knew what he was doing.

Curiously, the gooball Synapse commissioned to write the liner notes completely dismisses the film, splitting in Cardona’s long-dead fate. Too bad – a serious examination of the director is much needed.

Chris Alexander

ing a photograph of a little girl who Francis believes is a kidnapping victim) and is marred by an infuriatingly ambiguous ending that comes out of nowhere, but the dark look and feel of the film allows all this nonsense to work on some level. Frustratingly, Hanlon’s commentary on Image’s Special Edition DVD offers little more than, “This is a study of what happens when an individual loses faith in himself, in others, and in his God,” in service of an explanation.

Regardless, Hanlon demonstrates bravery in that he was willing to take arrier chances than most first-time directors. Then again, he also wrote the goofy mainstream bomb *Ghost Ship*, so who knows.

Aaron Lupton

HARSHER THAN SUNLIGHT

SLAUGHTER OF THE VAMPIRES (1962)

Starring Dieter Eppler, Walter Brandi

and Graziella Granata

Written and directed by Roberto Mauri

Retromedia



Ricardo Freda and Mario Bava are the Godfathers of Italian terror. Taking their cues from the Gothic pictures coming out of Britain’s Hammer Studios, Freda’s 1956 effort *I vampiri* and Bava’s immortal 1960 chiller *Mask of the Demon* (a.k.a. *Black Sunday*) were profitable and internationally celebrated, and officially kick-started the golden age of the Eurohorror film. As the ‘60s progressed, both artists thrived while a gaggle of would-be auteurs also tried their hand at the genre. Antonio Margherita’s *Danza Macabra* (a.k.a. *Castle of Blood*) and Mario Caiano’s *Nightmare Castle* were some of the more popular titles, but Roberto (King of Kong Island) Mauri’s *Slaughter of the Vampires* kinda fell through the cracks. Shame, as the picture is pretty damned spectacular.

Slaughter lives up to its moniker in the first five minutes as a pre-credit sequence illustrates the plight of a hunted vampire (German actor Eppler) and his toothy bride. He runs for the hills while she’s captured by angry villagers who impale her with a pitchfork. As she screams and spits black blood, we know we’re in good hands. The film then cuts to a remote Italian villa where a newly married couple (Walter Brandi and Graziella Granata – love those names!) are beginning their wedded bliss. When refugee vamp Eppler crashes the party, wifey gets a str-



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Slaughter of the Vampires: A Gothic, fanged melodrama in the tradition of Bava.

A CAVEAT EMPOR

THE DARK (1974)

Starring William Devane, Cathy Lee Crosby
and Keenan Wynn
Directed by John "Bud" Cardos
Written by Stanford Whitmore
Media Blasters

The Dark's only about 90-minutes long, but it took me over five hours to get through it, watching snippets of it here and there in between other DVDs, taking a shower and generally procrastinating. Yes, it really and truly is that dull.

Playing out like a way-substandard episode of *Kolchak: The Night Stalker*, *The Dark* has a Grizzly Adams-lookin' alien lurking about the streets of L.A. at night, strangling people or making them explode by shooting badly superimposed death rays out of its eyes. All that riveting action makes up about fifteen minutes of the film's running time, the rest of which is spent on sundry cops, reporters and vic-



Chris Alexander

tims' relatives standing around talking about how confused they are. And you'd best believe most of that dialogue falls well short of David Mamet's greatest hits. Bleeding Heart Reporter: "38-calibre justice?" Hard-Nosed Cop: "Listen, sister, nobody who's dead ever gets up and kills again." The novelty of a brief appearance by Casey Kasem is poor compensation.

It's unfair to fully blame director John "Bud" Cardos, since he was basically brought in as damage control. Tobe Hooper had originally been attached to direct but was unceremoniously turfed by producer Dick Clark for falling far behind schedule, and while I'm sure getting fired stung at the time, hindsight must have dear old Uncle Texas Chainsaw feeling like he dodged a SCUD missile.

The Media Blasters folks have tossed in a commentary track, as well as an interview segment with the amiable Cardos, whose resume also includes the just slightly better *Mutant* and the much better Shamerachophobia classic *Kingdom of the Spiders*. So go ahead and watch *The Dark* if you must, Gentle Reader. Just make sure you have at least two other DVDs you can peruse during the extended intermissions.

John W. Bowen

THE DEVIL'S HORNY PLAYTHINGS

VAMPIRE ECSTASY (1973)

Starring Marie Forsä, Nadia Henkova
and Nico Wolfstetter
Written and directed by Joseph W. Sarno
El/Seduction Cinema

Three things you need to know about the film *Vampire Ecstasy*: One, it's directed by art-porn king Joe Sarno; two, it's part of El/Seduction Cinema's new Girl Meets Girl Collection; three, it features enough kinky softcore sex and bloodletting to satisfy even the most jaded pervert. But if lesbian blood-suckers and untamed pubic hair make you wince, RUN, don't walk, to the next review.

A co-production with German exploitation producer Chris D. Nebe, *Vampire Ecstasy* wastes no time getting to the good stuff as a group of earthy Euro-babes dance naked over the opening credits to a pagan bongo beat. Then the damn plot kicks in. Oh well.



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LOW VOLTAGE SHOCK

PULSE (1988)

Starring Cliff DeYoung, Roxanne Hart and Joey Lawrence
Written and Directed by Paul Golding
Columbia Pictures

Considering it's a movie about evil electricity that turns household appliances to homicidal ends, *Pulse*—not to be confused with the 2001 Kiyoshi Kurosawa parts-shifter also known as *Kairo* nor its upcoming Dimension remake—is not the *Maximum Overdrive*-style *Machines Gone Wild* cheesefest its premise might lead you to believe. Instead, it's a surprisingly sober supernatural take on the paranoid rot at the heart of 1980s Spielbergian suburban bliss.

An unexplained lightning strike, possibly intelligent, certainly malevolent, transmits itself into the home of harried businessman Bill Rockland (DeYoung) and his newish second wife Elen (Hart, still sporting her *Highlander* hairstyle), turning their modern conveniences against them. Only Bill's visiting son (future has-been heartthrob Joey Lawrence) seems to notice the trouble.

Director Paul Golding (whose only other directorial credit is the 1986 short film *Herbie*, co-helmed with George Lucas) thoughtfully unveils the supernatural shenanigans in uniquely suburban terms. Painstakingly manicured lawns dry up and die, televisions interrupt seemingly endless broadcasts of *The Shopping Channel* with weirdly prescient Ringo-esque sequences (actually retasked clips from John Carpenter's *Starman*), and devices as benign as garage door openers and water heaters conspire to murder.

Golding uses this technophobic take on the haunted house genre to peel away the layers of this banal paradise. Bill's apparent nuclear family is revealed as a fractured mess, their safe home as a well-appointed prison (complete with bars on the windows—"for protection," Bill explains to his skeptical son early on), and their tightly-knit community as a clutch of apathetic voyeurs unwilling to lend their struggling neighbor a hand.

But the seriousness of tone and intent is also the film's greatest failing. Golding deserves kudos for credibly conveying his inherently ridiculous concept, but his hesitation to cut loose with that concept means *Pulse* flickers and fades out when it should spark, making its voltage much lower than it deserves to be.

Joseph O'Brien



A swarm of sexy tourists (including Swedish siren Forså) descend upon the mysterious and absolutely gorgeous Castle Varga in search of food and lodging. What they find instead is a coven of lesbian vampire witches intent on draining the dudes and ravishing the ladies. Between bouts of sweaty sex, there's some messy neck nibbling and a pretty intense staking scene. Then, it's back to the muff diving, and penis candle masturbation. Wheee!

In his prime, American filmmaker Sarno was essentially the more hardcore cousin to tit-o-holic exploitation guru Russ Meyer. *Vampire Ecstasy* (shot and initially released as *Veil of Blood*) isn't a great horror movie per se, in fact, it's not scary at all. What it does offer, though, is surprisingly sumptuous location photography, dollops of Hammeresque Gothic atmosphere, authentic sets, interesting performances and plenty of lovely, natural female flesh to gawk at. The decent-looking widescreen DVD also features a new interview with Sarno and Nebe as well as some sexy retro Sarno trailers. Curiously, the *El/Seduction* Cinema folks also offer this sizzling gem in a cut form under the title *The Devil's Plaything*. Why on earth would anyone want to see that?

Chris Alexander

BARE BUDGET TRIPLE FEATURE

THE BEAST BOX

Starring Jon Hall, Lon Chaney Jr., Bela Lugosi, et al.
Directed by Jon Hall, Curt Siodmak
and William Beaudine
Written by Joan Janis, Curt Siodmak
and Tim Ryan, et al.
Image Entertainment

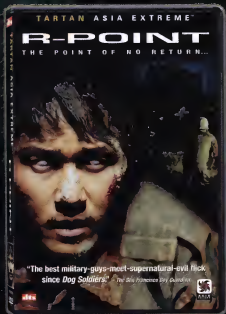
There isn't much to tie together the titles in Image's *Beast Box*, other than all three movies are black and white, they all boast hot babes, and they're all very low budget. But if your expectations are lower than your blood alcohol content, this cheapo collection can make for an evening of lowbrow fun.

First up is 1965's *Beach Girls and the Monster*, star-



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Beach Girls and the Monster: One of the goofiest beach party creature features ever made joins two monkey movies in The Beast Box.

ring Jon Hall (who also directs) as a bitter marine biologist who resorts to dressing up as a genetically mutated sea creature in torn garbage bags to scare off the beach bums who spend all day listening to surf tunes and "contribute nothing to society." The retro surf-rock soundtrack courtesy of Frank Sinatra Jr. is punky and cool, the voluptuous beach girls are aplenty, and the dialogue is cheesier than a Taco Bell value meal. What's not to love?

Bride of the Gorilla (1951) takes viewers for a more boring, albeit no less bizarre, turn. Raymond Burr plays plantation worker Barney Chavez, who's cursed by a local witch doctor into believing he is transforming into an ape after he chooses not to help his boss when the man is bitten by a venomous snake. It's hard to believe writer/director Curt Siodmak is the man responsible for writing the classic 1941 *Wolf Man* because *Bride of the*

Gorilla is easily the worst film in *The Beast Box*. Incidentally, Lon Chaney Jr. plays a rare good guy role here as a police detective but not even that makes this one worth your time.

A far less stern take on simian scares is made with famed cheap-ass William Beaumont's immortally titled *Bela Lugosi Meets a Brooklyn Gorilla* (1952). Lugosi plays the resident mad scientist on a tropical island who injects a stranded traveller with an ape-transforming serum after the poor sod gets a little too close to Lugosi's heartthrob. Expected monkey business ensues



Brooklyn Gorilla was made during Lugosi's very unglamorous morphine days, and was one of his last films before hitting rock bottom with Ed Wood. On the disc's interview with lead Sammy Petrillo, the actor is brought to tears when recalling Lugosi as a "grandfatherly" man who was kind, talented, constantly professional, and who had been treated entirely unfairly for his late-career downfall. The interview is the only noteworthy special feature on all three discs and makes for a serious commentary on an incredibly silly and sub-B-quality movie.

Aaron Lupton

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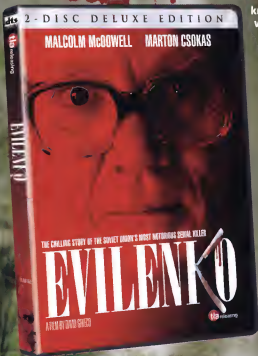
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HOWL OF THE OPEN ROAD

BY CHRIS ALEXANDER



If you're hairy you belong on a motorcycle." So says the tagline on Dark Sky's recent DVD release of Michel Levesque's long out-of-print cult oddity *Werewolves on Wheels*. Released in 1971 as the second half of a silly double bill with a cheesy biker biopic about Evel Knievel, the film wasn't much of a success and quickly faded into obscurity. But powered by its gloriously ludicrous title, *Werewolves on Wheels* eventually found its somewhat deranged core audience on video and evolved into a bona fide counterculture classic.

Produced by Paul Lewis — who worked on several late-'60s biker films including *Easy Rider*; and who later helped produce *Phantom of*

the Paradise and *The Hitcher* — *Werewolves* is a crossbred genre film that follows the raunchy exploits of a ragtag biker gang called The Devils Advocates. After much roughneck road action, redneck dust-ups and reckless substance abuse, the hellraisers come across a rural monastery run by a horde of cloaked hippie Satanists. The gang is fed loaves of evil bread and spiked vino, a female member dances nude with a big snake, and before you can say "Lon Chaney Jr.," they're cursed with lycanthropy.

"I think it is more mind-bending than scary," director Levesque tells *Rue Morgue*. "We were trying to screw with your head, not trying to make you jump from bumps in the night. We

used the werewolves sparingly, saving them for the end and I think that made it more effective."

Regardless, the film is undeniably a product of its time. In the early '70s, Levesque was eking out a living as a visual consultant for B-movie czar Roger Corman, but had aspirations to make his own film. The fact that his maiden voyage ended up being a prime slice of hog-howling hysteria was a simple matter of finance.

"Norman Herman, the associate producer for AIP on *Bloody Mama*, told me they would probably let me actually direct a picture if it involved bikers," says the elusive filmmaker from his LA office. "I called my old friend [co-writer] David [Kaufman] up and, after many frozen daiquiris, I decided to put werewolves on the bikes. The idea clicked with David; he went to the typewriter and in one manic session wrote a seven-page treatment laying out the whole trip."

And what a trip it is. Shot in a mere eighteen days for a meager budget of \$265,000, the movie was Levesque's first chance to fully apply the quick and dirty filmmaking approach he honed in Corman's camp. *Werewolves on Wheels* (a last minute moniker change from the more generic *Angels from Hell*) clicks on every level a cult film should. Aside from the titular hirsute moto-thugs, the film sports copious amounts of female nudity, graphic throat beatings, colourful, often ludicrous pseudo-meta-physical dialogue ("We must begin in blood! So we can end in blood!"), and one of the weirdest casts of any film of the era.

It features a swaggering leading performance by macho man Stephen Oliver (*The Naked Zed*,



Werewolves on Wheels' biker gang The Devil's Advocates.



A naked, Satanic snake dance is just one of the over-the-top scenes in *Werewolves on Wheels*.

"WE WERE TRYING TO SCREW WITH YOUR HEAD, NOT TRYING TO MAKE YOU JUMP FROM BUMPS IN THE NIGHT."

MICHEL LEVESQUE

an over-the-top turn by cult fave Severn Garden (*Battle for the Planet of the Apes*) and, most curiously, a supporting role fleshed out by '60s crooner Barry Maguire.

"I didn't really know Barry before the flick," admits Levesque. "I knew of his song 'Eve Of Destruction' and thought it was a great idea for him to be in the movie and sing his song, but unfortunately that didn't happen."

Instead, the pop star, along with much of the cast and crew recklessly threw themselves into their work, partaking in virtually every vice available to them. Indeed, the film became most notorious for its staggering levels of on-set debauchery, the likes of which rival any amount of sleaze seen onscreen (the specifics Levesque remains tight-lipped about).

"I understand Barry is a preacher now and regrets being in such a hedonistic bacchanal," the director allows. "He's not alone: several people involved in *Werewolves* became reformed sinners."

One of the most significant contributions to the film's drug-soaked atmosphere of debauchery, and indeed the glue that holds the arcane action together, is the outstanding trucker rock score courtesy of composer Don Gere. In the opening shots of the film the camera tracks the

pre-Satanic gang blazing down a grotty road while dirty psychedelic menace throbs in the background. It's heavy, sexy stuff, and wholly original for a horror(nish) film. Sadly, Gere composed only one other film score before falling off the face of the cinematic earth.

"Don used to come over to my place and play this weird country surfer music," Levesque recalls. "He was a killer guitar player, and wrote really funny ironic songs. He

would come to the editing room every few days to keep up with the cut, so he got totally into what we were trying to do. Shortly after that, Don, his wife and daughter disappeared into the bowels of Scientology and I lost contact with

them." (Sadly, after some research sparked by this interview, Levesque discovered that Gere had succumbed to brain cancer in 2002.)

After *Werewolves*, Levesque directed only one other film, the Russ Meyeresque sexploitation potboiler *Sweet Sugar*, before settling into a comfortable life as an art director and production designer. He even ended up working with the famed breast man auteur Meyer himself, serving as art director on three of his best films: *Supervixens*, *Beneath the Valley of the Ultra Vixens* and *Up*.

But it's *Werewolves on Wheels* that buzzed genre freaks will most remember Levesque for. Adored by movie miscreants and badass bike enthusiasts of all persuasions, the flick has aged wonderfully and remains as thoroughly bonkers an experience as it was in 1971.

"I know the film has the power to entertain people who have a tweaked point of view — it's a movie for folks who like to watch movies while under the influence," muses Levesque. "I don't know if I'm proud of it but I'm not embarrassed either. I think it's a film you love or hate. What amazes me most is that there are so many young people who can still get into it. That makes an old fart like me feel pretty good." ☿



CINEMARQUEE

ART HOUSE BEFORE
LAST HOUSE

THE VIRGIN SPRING (1960)

Starring Max Von Sydow,
Birgitta Pettersson and Birgitta Valberg
Directed by Ingmar Bergman
Written by Ulla Isaksson
Criterion

If you're a fan of Wes Craven's infamous debut *The Last House on the Left*, then you can't afford to miss *The Virgin Spring*, Swedish director Ingmar Bergman's intense, mid-career masterpiece. Based on a medieval ballad of murder and vengeance, *The Virgin Spring* is an acknowledged influence on Craven's sadistic shocker, sharing a similar storyline, a primal sense of violence, and scenes of emotional devastation.

The film takes place in 14th century Sweden as wealthy landowner Töre (Von Sydow) and his wife Märeta (Valberg) send their young, innocent daughter Karin (Pettersson) to a nearby church accompanied by her unmarried, pregnant half-sister, Ingeri (Gunnel Lindblom). While Ingeri is distracted by a villager along the way, the unassuming Karin encounters three sibling shepherds who deceptively convince the beautiful girl to go deep into the woods to share her lunch with them.

When Ingeri finally catches up with her, it's too late — as the older girl watches, the brothers brutally rape and kill Karin, steal her belongings and leave her body to rot. In a twist of fate, however, they end up seeking food and shelter at Töre's farm later that night, and when the eldest brother tries to sell Märeta a beautiful dress — the same one that Karin put on that morning — the family gets suspicious. After Ingeri finally arrives home and confirms Karin's grim fate, Töre unhesitates has knife and decides to take matters into his own hands.

As opposed to Craven's self-consciously sleazy portrayals of sex and violence in *Last House*, *The Virgin Spring* is a far more somber take on the Swedish legend that explores religion and humanity at the end of the Dark



The Virgin Spring: Ingmar Bergman's high art rape and revenge film.

Agas. Set at a time when Catholicism was sweeping into Sweden and usurping belief in pagan Norse gods, the film is a treasure chest of evocative symbolism, from sinister omens and images of spoiled purity, right down to the interplay of light and shadow. Far from being an end unto itself, Karin's tragic road trip is deftly used by Bergman as a catalyst for her family's Christian redemption — particularly for the Odin-worshipping Ingeri, who jealously wished harm upon her virginal half-sister, and Karin's father, who quickly laments his revenge-fueled attack on the killers.

Despite Bergman's loftier intentions with the material, his film often packs just as much punch as *Last House*, and sometimes more. The brothers' rape of Karin is repugnant, and her subsequent murder, as she's clubbed to death with a heavy tree branch, isn't particularly graphic, but in terms of gut-wrenching power it outdoes Craven at every turn. Likewise, when Töre turns his rage on the last brother, a mere boy who was not actually involved with Karin's death, the film becomes truly chilling.

Plot points aside, the most obvious difference between *Last House* and *The Virgin Spring* is one of pure technique. Where Craven was still learning his craft by hammering out low-budget drive-in flicks, Bergman

was reaching for perfection, and his film is unquestionably a cinematic achievement, with confident black and white cinematography and masterful emotional resonance. Von Sydow is especially excellent as the girl's vengeful father, striking commanding poses from his throne-like chair at the meager dinner table. It should be no surprise that the film won Bergman the first of three Oscars for Best Foreign Language Film, as it is truly a masterful accomplishment.

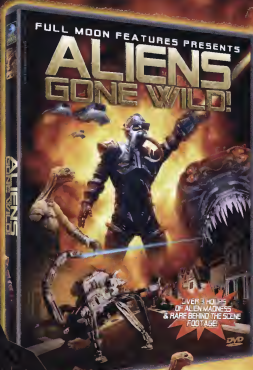
Criterion's new release of *The Virgin Spring* is no less impressive. The disc looks and sounds incredible, and includes a commentary by film scholar Birgitta Steene, interviews with stars Lindblom and Pettersson, audio from a 1975 seminar with Bergman, and an introduction by Ang Lee, who cites the work among his cinematic inspirations. The accompanying booklet even reproduces the infamous ballad itself.

Don't be scared off by Bergman's art house pedigree; this is an extremely straightforward, accessible landmark of Swedish filmmaking that shouldn't dissuade even diehard horror fiends. Indeed, *The Virgin Spring* is a film that can enhance appreciation of both Craven's contemporary adaptation, as well as horror cinema in general, illustrating how powerful, ancient legends still provoke and disturb audiences when they're rethought and reinvented as modern celluloid classics.

Paul Corupe



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MAD THE MUSINGS OF A SCHIZOID CINEPHILE

by Chris Alexander

People often come up to me and say, "Yo Alexander, what's the scariest movie ever made?" and I'm always at a loss for an answer. Fear is subjective, and horror is the most personal of genres. What makes the skin tighten 'round my neck may make you nod off in your Fruit Loops. That said, I'm going to abuse my pen-wielding power to blab about an underrated, seldom seen shocker—one that, while not necessarily a masterpiece, happens to be the scariest damn film I've ever seen, ever, ever, EVER. And I mean it this time.

When I was twelve I stayed up late on All Hallows Eve to catch a Pay TV screening of Dan O'Bannon's *Return of the Living Dead*. It goes without saying that my mind was suitably blown by this brain-biting classic, but it was the feature that followed that truly wormed its way into my paranoia zone that night. That film was Thom Eberhardt's quietly nerve-shredding 1983 paean to post-mortem mischief, *Sole Survivor*. Half of you have never heard of it, a quarter of you are shrugging your shoulders and saying "meh", while the rest are giving me mad putrid props. *Sole Survivor* nearly killed me that dreary preteen Halloween night, and after finally getting my mitts on an old, out-of-print Vestron VHS copy, watching it again still gives me the chills. Read on...

Chloe Sevigny look-alike Anata Skinner is inexplicably the sole survivor (hatch) of a catastrophic plane wreck. After the initial shell shock (and bloody, hair-raising nightmares) wears off, life slowly comes on. Except for one rather distressing thing: everywhere the poor lass goes, hollow-eyed, gawking mule weirdos seem to follow. They stare at her through restaurant windows, harass her in public parks, block her way on country roads; they're everywhere, and their numbers are multiplying. Skinner soon learns that these spectral stalkers are, in fact, the recently risen dead,

and now death itself is using this army of increasingly aggressive stiffies to bring her back into the black where she belongs.

Sound familiar? It should. The film takes its cues from Herk Harvey's shuddery 1962 classic *Carnival of Souls* and the *Final Destination* franchise owes the ham in its kisser to this picture. What makes *Sole Survivor* superior to these other, more celebrated, double-dealing reaper riffs however is its straight-faced, surreal and relentless gloomy style and sombre atmosphere. From frame one, when the first rumbles of David Anthony's minimalist score whisper across an empty midnight street, we know we're about to delve deep into the heart of celluloid darkness.

Eberhardt, whose credits include the bizarre cult valley girl apocalypse opus *Night of the Comet*, has crafted a supremely slowoo, obscenely eerie exercise in pure, undiluted *Twilight Zone*-ish terror with vigorous nods to both George Romero and Ingmar Bergman. This is one of those hard to handle, nihilistic downward spiral films, where you know the main character is doomed, and every move she makes is just another nail in her cosmically preordained coffin. But still you watch, powerless, lost in the dark thralls of a skillfully orchestrated cinematic death dream. Yikes, I'm getting goosebumps just writing that.

Have I perhaps boggled your frightful fancy, brutal reader? Are you ready to face the surreal sting of *Sole Survivor*? Well, good fucking luck. Out of print for twenty years, the only



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WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY THOM EBERHARDT
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AN INTERNATIONAL FILM MARKETING RELEASE

copy I've ever seen is the aforementioned Vestron VHS, which I own and plan to be buried with. Some dude somewhere owns the rights to this gem, and knowing my bum luck he'll release a deluxe DVD reissue after I croak, at which point I'll undoubtedly rise again and unleash some ironic zombie whup-ass on the prick. Death imitates art, after all.

Alexander out. ☹

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IN THIS ISSUE!

DEADBEATS. ELVIRA: MISTRESS OF THE DARK, AND SOULSEARCHERS
by various Claypool Comics

30 DAYS OF NIGHT DEAD SPACE #2 (OF 3)
by Steve Miles, Dan Wickline and Mike CW

BLACK HARVEST #1-3

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by Doug Grill and Daniel Froy Open Book Press

ELK'S RUN #5

by Josh Fiskow and Noel Tesson SpeakEasy

SHADOW ROCK

by Jeremy Love and Robert Love Dark Horse



Here's a novel idea: Comics for people who love comics. This is Claypool Comics' catchy and optimistic tagline. The question is whether or not it's a little naïve. I've read a number of this company's books and I can assure you that an incredible amount of effort goes into the scripting of each title – "wordy" is an understatement, and if you can read a Claypool product in less than fifteen minutes, you're skimming.

Claypool debuted in 1992 with licensed property *Elvira: Mistress of the Dark* (featuring the horror hostess in supernatural comedy adventures), followed shortly thereafter by original creations *Soulsearchers* (featuring semi-competent, super-powered ghost-busters) and *Deadbeats* (featuring vampires, straight up). All three titles are set in the same town: Mystic Grove, Connecticut, which seems to be as overrun with creepazoids as *The Goon's* Lonely Street. But if current market trends are any indication, the Grove might be fated to become the proverbial ghost town, population zero... as in, readers.

"The strength of our comics is their weakness," admits editor (and *Deadbeats* creator)

Richard Howell. "They are calculated to be intelligent, literate and witty, and to reward active minds. We don't ever say, 'This'll be too deep for the kids.'"

Fair enough: but I would distinguish "busy" (Claypool) from "deep" (Grant Morrison's *The Fifth*). Howell's actual point is that Claypool comics are highly referential, with a pun-heavy style that rewards readers who have a great deal of life experience without alienating those who don't.

To wit: "Lost continents and Nazis go together like beer and doughnuts!" quips *Elvira* in her current issue, while the latest *Soulsearchers* focuses on the "Calamityville Horror," Holy E.C., Batman! Further to the company tagline's suggestion of camaraderie, the inside front covers of all Claypool titles act as introductory pages.

"We pay attention to the craft of naming characters and their powers early on in each issue," Howell says. The idea is that new readers aren't excluded for lack of familiarity with continuity. Coincidentally, March marks jump-on points for all of the company's books, a now-annual trend that started only last year.

"We experienced a significant sales spike for those issues in 2005," Howell happily states. In other words, the approach works, and therefore there is no better time to sample all three of these titles than right now.

But is now, in fact, too late? North America's biggest comics distributor, Diamond, announced a new "profitability threshold" last fall, which is a corporate way of refusing to carry titles that don't sell an arbitrary amount of "enough." This leaves many an indie publisher – not just Claypool – without recourse.



Deadbeats: Claypool Comics' straight-up vampire title.

Fans of the *Elvira* comic needn't worry: like her bust, her sales are always ballooning. But this month could very well mark simultaneous jump-on and jump-off points for *Soulsearchers* and *Deadbeats*.

"We believe there is a solid market for the type of material we produce," Howell says, adding that "in a worst-case scenario, we'll go out swinging." In other words: the company's March offerings are classic Claypool.

So, do you like variety in the marketplace? Then help out the little guy for a change. After all, in terms of horror comics, there's a lot more of him out there than great big "super" men. Dare to be different this month – it'll cost you either side of \$15. And your vote does make a difference.

More info: claypoolcomics.com.

QUICK CUTS

Less than a year after giving us zombies in space (*Containment*), IDW's *Dead Space* now offers vampires in said vacuum. The main

difference? This time, it's part of the *30 Days of Night* brand. So, what could a space shuttle mission gone horribly awry possibly have to do with small-town Alaska? Two installments in and we still don't know, but at least you can't call this miniseries

predictable. The destruction of the vampire-infested shuttle at the end of issue #1 was a genius cliffhanger, however fictitiously suspect the events are surrounding the ship's launch (the astronaut captain drinking so hard the night before takeoff that he barfs – are you serious?). Still, consider me intrigued, even if things are starting to lean a little *Alien*, because Malaysian artist Milz was born to draw tech-heavy sci-fi (Warren Ellis, send this kid a text message!) and in terms of vampires, he's got TempleSmith's toothy template down pat.

UFOs, combusted corpses, the disappearance/reappearance of a teen hottie with angel-wing tats, perky tits and a waist that could slip through a basketball hoop – *Black Harvest* has it all. There's no doubt that writer/artist Josh Howard is cooking up some tangible intrigue here. Did the government kidnap Zaya, or was it the Martians, or the block parent committee? Shades of *The X-Files*, with all of that show's melodrama and less of its humour, which is all well

and fine. But Howard's character distinction/identification could use some polishing, ditto for his transitions and particularly his end pages. (Wrapping issue #2 with the completely unexplained sound effect, "Ka-kang, Ka-kang"? Not ominous.) I have to admit that I'm also a little concerned by the fact that this comic isn't a miniseries – hopefully the tagline "The truth only leads to more questions..." is a promise, not a threat. My guess: *Black Harvest* will work better as a collected edition.

The plot of *Cry Wolf* is pretty much the age-old tall tale: man goes into jungle, man gets bitten by wolf, man goes home and becomes an urban avenger with the powers of a werewolf. I'm admittedly sacrificing the suspense, but this book does the same job by obfuscating its trail with a lot of unnecessary overgrowth. Ultimately, writer Doug Crill wrings a functional, if massively stereotypical, tale from actual Borneo mythology. Alas, artist Daniel Frey pencils a story set almost entirely in the wild that's practically devoid of backgrounds. Some bark here, but zero bite.

Elk's Run is perhaps easiest described as Stephen King's *The Body* (a.k.a. *Stand by Me*) crossed with M. Night Shyamalan's *The Village*, but comics' best-kept secret is actually a great deal more. Five issues deep, this series just effortlessly generates momentum – a stunning achievement. With parents gone fascist and kids gone missing, the self-sequestered community known as Elk's Ridge goes into lockdown, and one of the redneck locals invokes the ghost of Jonestown, saying, "These things don't end well – ever." Oh, my blue-collar friend, if I could break down the fourth wall, here's what I'd tell you:



a far-from-happy ending is exactly the reason why we're reading this excellent book in the first place

There's a lot of love in the child-targeted ghost story *Shadow Rock*. First there's the actual surname of the

book's creative team, brothers Jeremy and Robert. But more importantly, there's the Loves' judicious handling of their subject matter. These guys understand that giving up good ghost for the pre-(w)teen set involves swapping all-out scares for

outré dares (to wit, the titular town's "don't go in there!" abandoned lighthouse). The cover intentionally lets kids know about the ghost and his haunt, smartly establishing the book's young heroes in the process. Adults without kids can probably afford to skip this one, but then again, *Shadow Rock* wasn't written for them in the first place.



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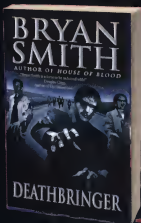
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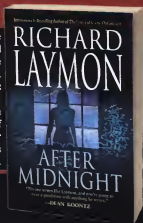
"Laymon always takes it to the max. No one writes like him and you're going to have a good time with anything he writes."

—Dean Koontz

A young woman descends into an ever-escalating nightmare of murder and madness when her only defense against an intruder is a Civil War saber.

"Bryan Smith serves up a feast of good old-fashioned horror. He knows what darkness lurks beneath the surface." —Brian Keene, author of *City of the Dead*

The dead come back to life and attack the living in a final battle for control of the Earth.



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The shriveled mummy in the desert roadside display looked harmless enough to the teenagers who stopped to see it—until it came to life...



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**The Lure of the vampire:
gender, fiction
and fandom from
Bram Stoker to Buffy**
Mitty Williamson
Waltflower Press

A vampire's flesh may be past its due date, but its heart and mind are ripe for academic study. And while many excellent books have been written about vampire lore and legend, as well as their place in cinema, few recent volumes compare to this fangtastic look at the fan culture surrounding it all.

First off, if your interest in *nosferatu* is purely aesthetic, be aware that you'll be reading passages about "Bourdieu's schema of position-taking in the hierarchy of the cultural field" – all properly footnoted, of course. So if that doesn't scare you, dig in!

Williamson begins by dissecting gender issues in Stoker's *Dracula*. She examines how the novel would have affected Victorian lower-class readers, taking a different view of the story's monstrous femininity and, in particular, the pivotal staking of Lucy. While some academics suggest it's punishment for her "wanton" behaviour, one akin to gang rape, Williamson reflects instead on the desecration of Lucy's corpse in an era when paupers were fed to the dissecting table and the thought of any post-mortem defilement would be a true nightmare. (As an aside, she covers some interesting facts about the 1832 Anatomy Act.)



From there it's straight into the heart of gothic geekdom, interviewing female vampire fans about just why they love lost boys like Lestat and Spike so much. If you've ever stood at an Anne Rice signing behind two teenage girls, their quotes will sound familiar. "They're not so different from us; they're not monsters, they're not ghouls."

Lure of the Vampire also has some juicy bits. In her case study of vampire fan clubs and their social hierarchy, Williamson reveals in-fighting between various "official" and "unofficial" Anne Rice fans in New Orleans. In the chapter on fan fiction (particularly relating to *Buffy*), she investigates the "rules" of online fandom. These sections are quite humorous and put a scholarly spin on old questions like "who died and made you king of the 'net'?"

Williamson's thought-provoking book is a fascinating read, not just for feminist vampire lovers but for those looking to examine their own fanged fandom.

Liisa Ladouceur

civil war ghost stories
Angus Konstam
Thunder Bay Press

If one is to adhere to the supernatural logic laid out by EC comics, it goes to follow that those fatally wronged by violence should, of course, return to exact revenge from beyond the grave. And considering that war creates a tapestry of senseless



death, then, of course, there should be some serious haunting action in its wake. This basic rule of posthumous shenanigans is the chief reason why books like *Civil War Ghost Stories* exist.

The American Civil War was a senseless and horrific battle that turned a country's populous against each other, and while I personally don't believe in spooks, this mythic internal collapse seems as good a reason as any for ghost stories. Author and historian Angus Konstam is the first to admit that previous to penning this tome, he himself had generally dismissed spectral activity as hokum. However, after much investigation, the tales of undead soldiers re-enacting bloody battlefield action became harder and harder to explain away, especially when related by scores of reliable, otherwise sophisticated witnesses.

Civil War Ghost Stories yanks (pun intended) us back to one of the darkest chapters in US history and details, with the aid of sometimes shocking black and white photos, virtually every horrific and glorious clash. After setting the stage, Konstam relates the ghost stories that evolved; some are truly scary (the Ghosts of Shiloh tale is creepy as hell), others are ludicrous (Ghostly Lincoln indeed...) but they're *always* compelling. Konstam isn't Hemmingway by any stretch, however his straight-up textbook approach to the material works, making for an unpretentious, involved read.

This is a book made primarily as a curio

The Grim Reader

THE FIELD GUIDE TO
HUGHEST MONSTERS

Aaron Blecha
and Jason Felix
AG/Books

With sly social commentary and a slew of disgustingly fun illustrations, artists Blecha and Felix craft a hilarious catalogue of Middle America's present mutants. Behold foul creatures like Quibbles the Sea Urchin Aierchest (a.k.a. Wonnabebe Gangsterus) or the slimy Amoeba Goo (a.k.a. Garmus: Nerdist) that works in a food court to sustain its video game habit. Shudder!

Dave Alexander



THE BLACKEST DEATH
VOLUME II

Edited by the staff of Black
Death Books

Black Death Books

Dubbed "24 tales of horror and wonder by the new masters of the macabre," *BDI II* leaves one wondering where the "masters" part was earned. Tales from Mike Admonson, Douglas T. Aronoff and D. Richard Pearce are grim and repulsive with personal hell, demons and succubi, but the overwhelming feeling of indifference hits quickly.

Keith Carman



UNREALIZED DREAMS

Richard Matheson
Gantlett Press

This book collects three of the great Richard Matheson's unpublished screenplays (*The Fantastic Little Girl*, *Appointment in Zaragoza* and *Horror* respectively) complete with copy edits and hand-scrawled notes. Matheson collectors will be in heaven; others need not apply.

Chris Alexander



HOW TO SURVIVE A ROBOT
UPRISING

Daniel H. Wilson
Bloomsbury Publishing

Wilson, a real-life robotics expert, really knows his 'bots, but this one-yoko guide to the robo-apocalypse quizzers and comes out long before its 176 pages conclude. Design geeks take note, though: Richard Home's gorgeous layout, type work and illustrations may make resistance futile.

Dave Alexander



A morbid Civil War-themed illustration from 1861 as featured in *Civil War Ghost Stories*.

for American history buffs and those who got a charge out of those old Time Life paranormal library things. Ultimately it ain't gonna make believers out of skeptics, but it's a fascinating peek into the long reverberating horrors of war. The shuddery photography alone makes it worth a look.

Chris Alexander

Kenneth Strickfaden, Dr. Frankenstein's Electrician

Harry Goldman
McFarland

A hint to aspiring authors: just because you have a story to tell does not mean it's worth telling. Take Harry Goldman, the retired science teacher's affection for Hollywood special effects man Kenneth Strickfaden led him to write *Dr. Frankenstein's Electrician*, a unimpressive biography which consumed hours of my life. And for what? To bore me with the story of a technician whose work, while notable, could have—and likely has—been adequately covered with a footnote in another work?

For those not familiar with him, Kenneth Strickfaden created the iconic "mad scientist" laboratory in the original *Frankenstein* (think arcing bolts of electricity). An inveterate tinkerer, "Kenstrie" crafted props and electrical devices with odd names like the Megavolt Senior, the Cosmic Ray Diffuser, the Pyrogeyser and the Scintillator for numerous movies and TV shows. Genre fans have likely seen his work in *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (1932), '60s TV show *The Munsters*

and *Young Frankenstein* (1974). He also lectured students across North America about the wonders of science, inspiring a generation of high school science teachers, including the author.

A private man, Strickfaden didn't talk much about himself, so his legacy is essentially his film work. (Not that there was anything to know. As his daughter Marilyn admits, "Partying to him meant having a hamburger sandwich and a chocolate malt.") Goldman confesses his inability to explain the enigma that was Kenneth Strickfaden in his preface, thoughtfully lowering our expectations for the rest of the text. Good thing, too, because what follows is essentially a recital of the man's career (the films he made, the schools he lectured at, the devices he created) combined with only the barest facts about his private life.

Goldman's enthusiasm for Strickfaden (acquired during a 1950 lecture) is endearing, and his subject did help create some iconic movie magic, but the cliché-ridden prose, combined with the dry nature of his subject, make *Dr. Frankenstein's Electrician* anything but an electrifying read.

Sean Plummer

Four and twenty blackbirds

Cherie Priest
Tor Books

There's something oddly comforting about the Gothic novel, and its kisser' cousin from the South. We all know, more or less, what's waiting for us between the covers—a decay-



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Dark Delicacies
 Del Howison and Jeff Galt, eds.
 Carol & Galt

Fear is subjective, and despite the best intentions, not all horror is scary or even disturbing. Proof can be found within the pages of the new *Dark Delicacies* anthology, where roughly half of the stories are entirely effective, while the remainder fall somewhere short.

With no particular thematic trappings, *Dark Delicacies* (co-edited by the one of the owners of the fantastic horror store of the same name, see p.82) serves up a collection of tales by spine of the genre's most revered writers, and includes a foreword by Richard Matheson (*RM433*) himself. Of the nineteen stories within, two are absolute knock-outs: Whitley Strieber's Kaddish can easily be declared a 1984 for the post-millennial world and Clive Barker's necrophilic closer Hecckel's Tail promises to unsettle even the most jaded genre reader.

Other noteworthy contributions come courtesy of Robert Steven Rhine who offers a haunting tale about a terrible, unwanted psychic gift, while F. Paul Wilson extends the dangers of blackmailing the Chinese underworld in Part Of The Game, and Richard

Layman's more wacky love story *The Diving Girl* incites shivers in its final chords, much as Brian Lumley's slow-brew sci-fi like *My Thing Friday* does. Nancy Holder and Steve Niles both mine the carnival subgenre admirably with two original works that post cannibalism as an addiction and an inherited taste, respectively.

The rest of the entries cover territory from intriguing (David J. Schew's *The Pyre And Others*) to forgettable to downright embarrassing (Rick Pickman's *Dark Delicacies Of The Dead* changes the names of several horror celebrities slightly, infuses others with supernatural abilities, then pits them all against an unexplained zombie apocalypse — need I say more?).

Sadly this unevenness seems to be the norm rather than the exception when it comes to short fiction collections. Names are names, but a name alone does not a quality story make, and *Dark Delicacies* is by no means the only anthology to fall into that trap. Like novels, short stories can be judged on their re-readability. That said, what's good in here is damned good and well worth a second, third and even tenth read: it's just a damn cryin' shame it isn't more consistent throughout.

Monica S. Kuebler

ing family with a closet full of skeletons, old sins erupting in the present, and a creepy mansion inhabited by a ghost or two (or in this case, three).

Cherie Priest makes her debut with *Four and Twenty Blackbirds*, a coming-of-age horror novel firmly rooted in the Gothic landscape and literary traditions of her native Southern US.

Meet Eden Moore, orphaned at birth by her mother and subsequently raised by four fiercely protective women — one being her sultry aunt Lulu, the others a trio of spectral sisters. So when Eden's life, as well as that of her aunt, is threatened she consults her ghostly guardians, who urge her to seek answers in the tangled roots of the Moore family tree.

Eden's search takes her from an abandoned sanatorium in Tennessee to the ruins of a Georgia mansion to the mucky Florida marshlands. Of course, every voodoo-jinxed, Spanish moss-strewn clue only manages to draw young Eden deeper into the mystery.

Priest's tough-yet-lovable goth heroine will likely garner adoration from *Buffy* fans and budding feminists, but whether this book will find its niche amongst horror readers who've been spoiled by the fiercer Southern Gothic yarns of writers like Tom Pickett (*RM446*) remains to be seen. This is not to say that Priest doesn't have the goods, 'cause lawd almighty the girl can write. Her lyrical prose is reminiscent of Poppy Z. Brite at her finest.

Four and Twenty Blackbirds is a good novel, but what ultimately keeps it from being a great novel is its familiarity. There is precious little in way of fresh concepts here. Literary comfort food is fine, but in this case one only sees the author's unused potential. If Priest tackled a less formulaic storyline, the result would be staggering.

Richard Gavin

The Midnight Hour
 James Chambers and Jason Whitley
 Die Monster Die Books

It's not just for witching anymore: *The Midnight Hour* is now a (fictitious) syndicated radio show hosted by professional supernatural hunk debunker Madeline Night. It's also the eponymous title of a short story collection that follows the exploits of Maddie and her myth-bustin' crew.

As the formula here dictates, each of the book's eight functionally independent stories can be linked to paint a bigger picture. Alas, the key word here is "formula" because every story, without exception, pits our un-dumbfoundable doubters against indubitable monsters. Miz Night is equal parts Scully and Mulder in one convenient tank top, while her wisecracking but tough sidekick Reggie is straight out of a Joss Whedon (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) script.

The Midnight Hour's biggest problem is that the character writing consistently fails to ring true. A staple device throughout is the use of "here's how it happened" excerpts from the radio show, which one assumes are meant to display true toughness in the face of, well, flashbacks. Too bad they also inadvertently substitute momentum with anti-climax.

An additional drawback: drawings. The book contains some 60 black and white illustrations meant to enhance the text. Fair enough, it's not your everyday strategy, but to be kind, the best horror is left to the imagination; to be kinder, in the book's zaniest moments the artist has the unenviable task of fleshing out airborne vampire fish and a baker who's practically turned into the equivalent of the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man. And to be brutally honest — the art's pretty poor — you really can judge this book by its cover.

That said, if you're into *Kolchak* and *The X-Files* in a leave-no-stone-unturned kind of way, you might want to check out *Upon A Slender Stem* and *Saint Lavin Hill*, the two best tales in this average collection.

Gary Butler



illustrated books have long been the territory of children's fiction, but BROM, an accomplished painter, seeks to shatter that conception with *The Plucker*, a violently dark storybook for adults.

FATAL Fairy Tale

by MONICA S. KUEBLER

So there really are monsters under the bed. In the case of young Thomas, there's a single, vile and vengeful demon known as a Plucker, who's hell-bent on stealing the young boy's "gusto" (essence) so that he can possess the child's body in order to pluck it, his minions (called Foulthings) callously murder Thomas' toys, as it is the boy's gusto that gives them their sentience and life while he sleeps. The Foulthings hunt them, drive pins through their eyes, then tear them to pieces and feast on the discarded corpses. Only Thomas' 72-year-old African nanny, her aunt's knowledge of hoodoo spells and a jack-in-the-box stand between the Plucker and his chosen vessel.

"My kids inspired the book," author and illustrator Brom tells *Ave Magazine* bluntly, explaining that reading classic tales like *Winnie the Pooh*, *The Velveteen Rabbit* and *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* (which also feature living toys) to his children helped form the basis of his own story. "It was while I was reading these that I began to contemplate what would happen if these toys were introduced to a hard dose of reality, and what if some-

thing very, very bad entered their happy little world? Could these toys learn to kill to protect themselves?"

Brom, an artist who oddly credits his interest in horror in part to a disgusting "lump greens" dish his step-grandmother cooked when he was a kid, along with shows like *Dark Shadows*, *Night Gallery* and classic horror magazines *Creeper* and *Eerie*, explores this question in *The Plucker*, his first storybook (available from Harry N. Abrams, Inc.).

After a short stint as a commercial artist working on campaigns for Coke, IBM and CNN, Brom began providing fantasy illustrations for book covers, the *White Wolf* RPGs, video games and even genre films such as Tim Burton's *Sleepy Hollow*. Now with *The Plucker*, he's trying his hand at yet another new medium, with truly compelling results.

"I've always considered myself a storyteller, whether through pictures or words," says Brom, who is primarily self-taught, but cites artistic influences as varied as Frank Frazetta, Richard Corbin, Alphonse Mucha and Norman Rockwell (!). "The combination of the two seemed a natural progression—the ultimate way to tell a story in the print medium."

Over 100 richly-toned illustrations (each a combination of acrylic and oil) complement the intricate tale. They range from innocent portrait-style portrayals of the story's heroes to images of the Plucker and his Foulthings (ill-formed abominations of cloth, hair, nails and teeth, etc.) to bone-frozen epic battles complete with arcs of blood and still-breathing toys restrained in twine and wire bondage—already robbed of their eyes. Nudity and profane language are both present, but to Brom's credit, neither is used gratuitously.

It's not surprising then that Brom's major challenge was not the writing or illustration of *The Plucker*, but finding a publisher for it.

"The biggest hurdle was trying to convince marketing folks that illustrated books are not just for children," he explains. "There seems to be a preconceived notion among marketing circles that books with illustrations and animated movies are only for kids. I believe they're overlooking a huge audience of adults that have a deep appreciation for sophisticated stories and finely crafted images."

When asked if he would ever consider using his talents to write scary stories for children, Brom candidly admits: "Yes, I try. I start with the best intentions, but the blood, profanity and innuendo seep in amongst the teddy bears and bouncy balls."

For more information visit bromart.com.



WARNING!

TRAVELOGUE OF TERROR

DARK DELICACIES
BURBANK, CALIFORNIA
by Joseph A. Vuckovic



In the market for a spiderwebbed table runner or a skull ornament for your Black Christmas tree? How about that Limited Edition Sideshow *Hellboy* statue, an original monster painting, the *From Beyond* soundtrack, an autographed copy of that rare Richard Matheson novel, or a book that will teach you how to build your own coffin? If it's creepy, chances are you'll find it at Dark Delicacies, North America's first all-horror book and gift store.

Located at 4213 W. Burbank Blvd. in Burbank, California, Dark Delicacies is an essential stop on any horror lover's tour through the Golden State. It's a gloomy smudge on California's otherwise sunny landscape and the second home of genre fans Del and Sue Howison, who opened the shop back in 1994 out of sheer necessity.

"When we moved in together we wanted to decorate our house to reflect our taste [but] we really had a hard time finding items to do this with," white-haired co-owner Del tells *Rue Morgue*. "For instance, we'd find a catalog of items an inch thick and there'd be maybe one or two items we'd actually want to buy. So our thought was: 'Wouldn't it be cool to find the couple of items from each catalog and put them all in one place?'"

And that's exactly what they did. After testing out the market with tables of horror wares at comic book shows and conventions, Howison found a location in Burbank near their home and, with their personal collection of books, some T-shirts and art, opened their doors to the public. A year later, the couple were married in the store – bleeding coffin cake and all.

The first thing you'll see as you drive down the

otherwise unremarkable stretch of California road (just minutes from North Hollywood) is a six-foot tall Frankenstein monster with his arms outstretched – he's your signal to pull over and park (free of charge). As you approach you'll notice the windows are adorned with posters often advertising upcoming in-store celebrity signings.

As part of their mandate to make Dark Delicacies "a home for horror," the Howisons began to host autograph events back in 1995, and their first guest was Sarah Karioff (daughter of legendary actor Boris). Since then the signings have become their trademark, with two or three per month and hundreds of celebrities on their roster, including genre legends like Forrest Ackerman, Ray Harryhausen, Richard Matheson and Paul Naschy; contemporaries Clive Barker, Guillermo del Toro, Eli Roth and store regular Steve Niles; as well as artists like Bernie Wrightson, Gris Grimly, Jhonen Vasquez, Eric Pignors and D.W. Frydendall.

"I never know how many people were involved in horror and that they would be some of the greatest and nicest people we'd ever meet," Del muses. "From Richard Matheson to Clive Barker to Guillermo del Toro to Jonathan [Leapers] Creepers Breck – this is a great field. They're not all chameleons but the majority are wonderful."

Don't live in California? Not a problem. In many cases books and posters for signings can be pre-ordered online. The Howisons will personally have your item autographed and mailed to you for the cost of shipping (autographs are free of charge when you purchase an item). Even stock books ordered through their online store have been known to arrive with a bookplate and autograph – a deliberate leftover from a signature event.

But back to our tour. Once inside the store proper – a bona fide chamber of horrors that's been described as "Hell's gift shop" and "the Macy's of the Macabre" – visitors are always greeted by one or both of the beloved owners. As compelling and kind as they are, it's difficult to spend a few minutes with them without darting your eyes around and peering over their shoulders at the new release shelf and trinkets dressing the front counter.

As Del points out, there's something here for every ghoul. "This store is about 50 percent books, new and used. The other half of the store is divided up between DVDs, action figures and toys, collectibles, clothing (mostly T-shirts), jewelry, and odd little items like 'Zombie survival kits' and such."

When you're released by the Howisons to peruse their black bazaar, your first stop might be the jewelry counter, where all manner of bejeweled insects, accursed charms, brooding brooches, menacing money clips, weird wallets, scary scarves and other accessories are contained. Gris Grimly T-shirts and Demonia purses hang a few steps ahead, while handmade spooky stoneware and other horror home decor adorn the shelves of the glass display cases lining the left wall. If you look up, you may see some original art for sale by one of your favorite artists.

By now you've reached the centre of the store, where tables have been set up because you took our advice and visited on a day a signing was scheduled. After you've waited in line to meet the genre icon of your dreams, by visiting the back wall behind them where toys, action figures and other collectibles reside. Here's where you might find those Jack Skellington lights or Universal Monsters plush toys. Calendars, diaries, postcards and grieving cards are also scattered on a rotating rack nearby. As you work your way along the massive wall of DVDs (many of which are also autographed) you'll find yourself delivered to the fantastic book section.

What's interesting about the book section at



Dark Delicacies is not that it's categorized, rather, it's the categorizing themselves.

"Fiction is the main category and since we only sell horror and horror-related books it's pretty much assumed that fiction is horror. It's also our biggest section," Del explains. "However, one subgenre of the fiction section is Vampire – including fiction, anthology, and non-fiction. The rest of the books are broken up as Anthology, True Crime, True Ghost and Haunts, Funeral and Death, UFO, Psychic, Fortune Telling and Astrology, Metaphysics and Craft, Religion, Special Editions and Art Books."

Dark Delicacies even released its own anthology of the same name late last year that features the original Barker tale that formed the basis of the upcoming *Masters of Horror* episode helmed by Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer director John McNaughton, along with stories from a handsome collection of genre greats (see pg. 80). Del himself even contributes the afterword – his first published short story appeared in the 2004 horror collection *Strange Bedfellows* (RMS). Depending on how the anthology sells, they're hoping to take a stab at a sequel. But the Howisons' aren't stopping there.

"My future plans are to spread the name and influence of Dark Delicacies without expanding the brick and mortar location. We'd also like to lend our name to quality horror films in some aspect," says Del, an actor in his own right who's appeared in several indie genre films. "We don't think it needs to be big budget to be good but it does need to be a project where the people who are involved really care about horror."

One thing's for sure: Dark Delicacies cares about horror. And if the Howisons' efforts in the genre aren't proof enough for you, pay their store a visit, and tell 'em Rue Morgue sent you.

Dark Delicacies is open from 10:00 AM to 7:00 PM Tuesday through Friday, and 11:00 AM to 6:00 PM on Saturday and Sunday. Their toll-free phone number is 1-888-DARKDEL. Visit darkdel.com for more info and to join their mailing list. ☺



Above: Del and Sue Howison and two views of their store, Dark Delicacies.

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DINNER'S READY! THE GORE-MET

This issue, The Gore-met wipes his blood-drenched desk clean of some noteworthy Eurohorror releases.



Strip Nude for Your Killer. Apes Bava's seminal giallo *Blood and Black Lace*.

Last year VCI Entertainment unleashed a definitive two-disc "Unslashed Collector's Edition" set of Mario Bava's seminal giallo *Blood and Black Lace* (1964), and its significance within the genre cannot be understated. Bava not only forged the template for the popular Italian giallo genre of the '70s, he also inaugurated the "body count" film (the original Italian title, *Sei donne per l'assassino*, literally translates as "Six women for the murderer"), that, along with his 1971 bloodbath *Twitch of the Death Nerve* (*Reszione*), presaged the American slasher cycle of the early '80s.

The iconic black-gloved killer and high society sleazebaggy that are the trademarks of the giallo genre have their roots in this wonderfully rendered tale of murder and blackmail amongst the models and management of the Italian fashion house Christian Haute Couture. The plot takes a backseat, though, to Bava's lavish and surprisingly brutal murder set pieces, especially the scenes featuring the model that has her faced mashed into a red-hot wood stove, and the propensity for her corpse to appear at the most inappropriate of times.

Bava shot *Blood and Black Lace* in Technicolor, a process that provides rich and vivid imagery, and VCI have not disappointed with this release, which features an anamorphic print that restores the original title sequence that was excised from the North American release. The

extensive supplements, which have been carried forward from previous releases, are spearheaded by an exhaustively researched commentary track by Video Watchdog's Tim Lucas.


As a subgenre, the giallo was pretty much exhausted by the time Andrea Bianchi, best known for the gory incestuous tit-munch in the Italo-zombie classic *Burial Ground* (1981), aped Bava's film in the aptly-titled, bearded clambake *Strip Nude for Your Killer*, now available from Blue Underground. Bianchi competently hit all the genre marks — catchy lounge-jazz score, stylish lighting and cinematography, and shocking violence — but really went overboard on the feminine eye candy, as this movie surely features the most full-frontal nudity in any of its ilk.

Nino Castelnuovo and Edwige Fenech star as horny fashion photographers who investigate a series of murders amongst the models and management of an Italian high fashion house after one of their own dies during a backroom abortion. While the end reveal is completely out of left field, overall, the film is a solid example of the genre. The extras are light, but the disc features an excellent transfer with solid black levels, which is important because much of the action takes place at night.

With garish lighting sometimes described as reminiscent of a Bava film, and no actual Frankenstein's monster in sight, Media Blasters' release of *Frankenstein's Bloody Terror* is legendary drive-in distributor Sam Sherman's rob-

bing of Hell Creatures, itself an international edit of Enrique López Eguíluz's *La marca del hombre-jobo* (1968). It's also one of the major catalysts for the Spanish horror boom of the early '70s, and Paul Naschy's first film. Naschy (*RAM-68*) wrote the script and was subsequently cast in the lead when the German producers couldn't find a suitable actor, thereby launching a career that has endured four decades.

The film is a successful mix of the Universal monster mashers of the '40s and the Gothic sensibilities of the Hammer Studios canon. It also introduced Naschy's greatest character, the tragic lycanthrope Waldemar Daninsky, into the cinematic lexicon. Daninsky is cursed by the bite of a werewolf resurrected by Gypsy grave robbers. He unknowingly contacts a pair of Satan-worshipping vampires for a cure and all monster hell breaks loose, including the bloody slaughter of a woodsman and his daughter.

The film was shot in 3-D and the DVD was compiled from multiple source elements, so the image quality varies, but never to the detriment of this important slice of Eurohorror. An informative commentary from Sherman and a half-hour interview with Naschy are the highlights of the extras included on this worthy release. 



Now that my chopping block is clean.
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AUDIO DROME

REVIEWS BY CHRIS ALEXANDER, BRETT BAKKER, TOMB DRAGOMIR,
MARK R. HASAN AND AARON LUPTON



THE EXORCISM OF EMILY ROSE

Christopher Young
Lakeshore Records

Including his score for the American version of *The Grudge*, Christopher Young has delivered two of the most terrifying soundtracks in recent years. With *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, Young employs rumbling and shrieking dissonance to evoke the assaults of an omnipotent entity, while a mournful female voice glides from unstable spatial dimensions before Young goes for shrill metallic strings and watery synths. Fans of his early, more avant-garde writing – particularly his non-film material – will appreciate that he's returned to the genre with a level of technical sophistication far greater than his early work (although the album does ultimately conclude with soothing harmonics). For maximum effect, play after midnight.

MRH ****

Soundtrack

a menacing, driving phrase counterpointed with a plaintive, morbid edge – sets up the film's derivative tale of wandering twits who stray deep into a geological Venus flytrap. Much of the remaining score waddles between ambient synth material evoking misty, murky, bottomless pockets of unseen danger, and brief orchestral-styled suspense cues for Characters Desperately Trying To Get Out. Less effective than the duo's effort for *Romero*, the imitative film left little to inspire the composers, and it's a fairly standard score with an otherwise compelling main theme.

MRH *** 1/2



A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET

Charles Bernstein
 Varese Savanah

Having already tackled the genre via *The Entity* and *Cujo*, Charles Bernstein enjoyed a short horror wave during the 1980s courtesy of *Covenant*, *April Fool's Day* and *Deadly Friend*, but he's best-known for scoring the first *A Nightmare on Elm Street* film. Previously paired on a CD with Christopher Young's orchestral score for *Elm Street II*, Bernstein's music has been remastered and re-released solo, but like the remaining entries in the series, this is vintage synth material. That's not a bad thing necessarily, early synth scores reveal both the limitations of the musical gear, and iconic sounds that bear a certain nostalgic charm. Modern toys can

Soundtrack

easily replicate these sparkling or bass-heavy tonalities, but there's a warm quality to the drones, shimmering effects and thumping, synthetic percussion in these benchmarks of pop-fusion soundtracks.

MRH ****



THE SKELETON KEY

Various Artists
 Varese Savanah

Compilation song and score albums are a rare venture for soundtrack specialist Varese, and

Soundtrack

while the included vintage blues tunes are first-rate, it's still a frustrating experience in flipping to Edward Shearmur's music every two to three tracks. Score cuts focus on shifting moods, such as intro guitar strums smothered by shivering strings and vigorous percussion. Those familiar with Shearmur's stellar music for *Reign of Fire* will find similarly dense writing, proving he's one of the more sophisticated composers today, comfortably moving between diverse writing styles. Ben Escapes is a marvelously atmospheric cue, but with more than half of the album comprised of intrusive songs, this one's purely for completists. Meshmash compilations, no matter how slickly produced, satisfy no one. MRH *** 1/2



THE DEATH RIDERS

Soundtrack for Depression
 Horror Hiss

Ex-Rob Zombie bassist Blasko's new four-headed rock monster's long-anticipated full length was well worth the torturous wait. Featuring Johnny Coffin of the Coffin Case Co., so guitar and the scowling vocals of a bona fide lead growler they call The Messenger, *Soundtrack for Depression* forges top-shelf production from blood, sweat and tattered leather with nary a throwaway track. Along with the rumbling surf-styled *Suffer* and the Alice Cooperesque hard ballad *Dead Garden*, we recommend (nay, command!) revving up with *Death in The Valley* (which borrows a little from the Mr. Show theme song in a dusty western kind of way) and a curious but cool cover of *Wall of Voodoo's* Mexican Radio (whoa ohhh) complete with upright bass. TO ****



THE CAVE

Reinhold Heil and Johnny Klimek
 Lakeshore Records

Reinhold Heil and Johnny Klimek (*Land of the Dead*) re-teamed for *The Cave*, and their main theme –

Soundtrack

SONGS FROM THE VIDEO DROME

VARIOUS

Psychobilly Sickens: Episode 1

SHY SIX PICTURES/HARALL 8 RECORDS

Psychobilly

For anyone who's ever brushed the top of a door frame with a pompadour, there's something special about a documentary that starts off with the owner of a psychobilly label picking a big chunk of dog crap off his shoes before explaining exactly what psychobilly is. For the uninitiated, Kim Nekromani (Nekromantix, RM447, and HorrorPops, RM438) describes the musical movement as "Elvis meets the Wolfman", while another scenerester explains, "Have you seen *Heidi Klum*? Well mix that with some Elvis."

From there the disc launches into the great debate: who he'll started psychobilly anyway? Johnny Cash? The Cramps? Elvis? While acknowledging the contributions of all of these groups, the answer is a resounding Metel! The doc devotes a good portion of time to the pioneering band, showcasing footage from old shows along with some extremely low-fi video of the group's current incarnation. Sadly though, this part of the audio on the DVD is so randomly poor, it sounds like it was recorded on a Fisher Price tape deck that fell down a well.

The DVD's greatest strength is the variety of psychobilly personalities it includes—guys like Geoff Kresge of HorrorPops, Mark Burke of Phantom Rockers, Nick 13 from Tiger Army and Mutsumi Yasnaga from Battle of the Ninja, who takes viewers through the psycho scene in Japan. These guys get to the heart of everything that makes a psycho a psycho, from how to do your hair to what's haute couture in psycho fashion.

The major drawback is that little time is devoted to other influential Klubfoot bands (where the scene originated in the UK) like Demented Are Go, Coffin Nails and The Guana Batz. It also would have been nice to include some live footage of full songs or at least a few videos. Additionally, the steadfast connection between horror and psychobilly is never really fully explored. If you can handle the audio irregularities, *Psychobilly Sickens* is a flawed yet insightful look at one of horror's most enduring musical subcultures.

BB 3.5/1/2



ALEX OTTERLEI

Classical

Horror on the Orient Express

AD MUSIC

Alex Otterlei is a very talented Belgian composer who creates soundtracks for films that don't exist. His latest concept work is *Horror on the Orient Express*, a work inspired by the popular *Call of Cthulhu* role-playing game. And while it's a professional, impressively orchestrated and conceived piece of work, it ain't scary at all. The elaborate cover design and art booklet is lovely too, but again, not scary. If John Williams's score for *Jurassic Park* got your blood up, this might pique your interest, otherwise roll your dice and Zzzz. CA 3.5/1/2

ing eerie Marlin's landings (Scientists And Madmen), biological mutants (Attack Of The Radioactive Freaks) and an assortment of nebulous interstellar audio emissions. With a couple of too-long, tough-to-take adventures (Beyond the Stars, Marlin's Dreams), Steladrine's "hard listening for a deaf world" doesn't command you to listen, however, avoiding it altogether could have dire consequences for the earth as we know it. TD 3.5/3



GUTTER DEMONS

Psychobilly

Room 209

PHANTOM RECORDS

The latest effort by Montreal's Gutter Demons is like a serial killer's twisted psyche come to life over a soundtrack of gravelly, pummeling, yet oddly melodic psychobilly. Room 209's artwork is laid out with faux Bates Motel-style murder scene photography and the lyrics tell nightmarish tales of personal demons and crimes of the deadliest kind. Tiger Army influences are easily detected in the cold, snaky guitar work of songs like Bured Alive and Psycho-Rama, giving Room 209 that modern American psycho sheen, while the SoCal punk influence that creeps up here and there serves as a nice counterbalance to Johnny Toek's gruff vocals. Oozing with blood and bad vibes, Gutter Demons live up to their name as some of the last folks you'd want to run into in a back alley. AL 3.5/3.5

STELLADRINE

Electronic

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With 60 minutes of radioactive blips, beats and prophecies of doom, the freaky frequencies of Steladrine conceptualize the darker side of the moon via 1950s sci-fi schlock like *Lost in Space*. Semi-songs about Marban war, radioactivity and disintegrating children rolled into an ethereal Science Fiction soundscape, *You'll Never See Your World Again* is an exhaustive and exhausting audio collage evok-



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With painstaking dedication, two Californians under the guise of **Monstrous Movie Music** have devoted themselves to resurrecting the soundtracks for classic creature features.

REQUIEM FOR A SCREAM

BY MARK R. HASAN

When classic monsters attacked, they rarely did so silently. Each time giant ants, hideous sea creatures and terrifying aliens wreaked havoc on helpless Earthlings the carnage was set to the most dramatic of orchestration. And while those B-movie creatures were immortalized on posters and in the pages of *Famous Monsters* magazine, their soundtracks would never have lives of their own. But all that changed ten years ago when David Schechter and Kathleen Mayne began resurrecting the monster music of yesteryear.

The decision to enter the soundtrack market and preserve the nostalgic sounds of classic movies stemmed in part from the couple's long-time friendship with the late Tony Thomas, an independent producer during the '70s and '80s who released many vintage scores from archival acetate LPs. Back in the early '90s, Thomas had hired Mayne, herself a classical composer, for transcription and orchestration work, and her increasing familiarity with the nuances of movie music made her indispensable when plans for the label's first album were set in motion. It was a dream project for Schechter that was formalized after the couple had attended a Hollywood Bowl concert where Henry Mancini conducted a suite from one of his earliest scores, *Creature from the Black Lagoon*.

"Hearing that music, with all the instrumental details coming out, instead of [that] scratchy old sound from 1954 just sent me into heaven," recalls Schechter. "So when we went home, I talked to my wife, and said I'd like to do an album of monster music."

In 1995 Monstrous Movie Music was officially formed as an independent label specializing in

re-recorded classic horror and sci-fi scores. The first release — also titled *Monstrous Movie Music* — marked the CD debut of substantive unreleased music from B-classics *Them!*, *It Came From Outer Space*, *The Mole People*, and *It Came From Beneath the Sea*.

Having selected films for the first album, Mayne reconstructed the instrument parts and complete cues using surviving conductor sketches and audio sources. The couple then shopped their concept to various soundtrack labels, and were surprised by the responses.

"We heard from a couple of them immediately, and they said 'Yes, we want to do that,'" Schechter explains. "And I looked at my wife and said, 'There seems to be an interest in this thing. I think we're really on to something,' and she said, 'Why don't we do it ourselves?'"

The newbie producers received support and plenty of advice from industry friends and contacts, and after clearing music rights with each score's publisher and owner, they engaged Japanese conductor Masatoshi Mitsumoto to record the music with orchestras in Slovakia and Poland.

"[Mitsumoto] had to get a good performance that matched the one done 50 years ago by Warner Brothers, or Universal or MGM," Schechter says. "When many companies record film music,



they let the conductor 'interpret' the music. But with us, Masa had to match the way somebody else did it in the past ... and Masa is very special in that he has no trouble checking [his] ego at the door for the good of what we're trying to do."

The company's second release, *More Monstrous Music*, brought to life orchestration from *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*, *Tarantula*, *The Monolith Monsters* and *Gorgo*. Following that they put out *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (and other jungle pictures), which includes tracks from *Tarzan* and *The Alligator People*. The company's latest two releases, *Mighty Joe Young* and *This Island Earth*, feature additional music from *20 Million Miles to Earth* and *The Animal World*, plus tracks from *The Day of the Trifids*, *War of the Satellites* and *Earth Vs. The Flying Saucers*. The releases include thick booklets, plenty of liner notes and vibrant illustrations by Robert Aragon. Schechter and Mayne, who work out of an office in Burbank, now release Monstrous Movie Music exclusively through mmmrecordings.com.

The company may be a monstrous undertaking (pun intended) in many ways, but it's clearly also a labour of love for the lifelong B-movie fiend fanatics. Schechter points out, "Nobody did albums of monster music back then, really. People would do famous films, but these were my classic films that I grew up with, watching them on late-night TV."

PLAY DEAD

GRAPHICS **PLAYABILITY** **SHIVERS**

HIGHEST RATING IS OUT OF THREE.

GAMES REVIEWED BY ANDREW LEE



CALL OF CTHULHU

Bethesda Softworks
Xbox

After a delayed release, *Call of Cthulhu* (RM44), my soggiest, tentacle-filled Lovecraftian nightmare finally showed up at the Rue Morgue offices late last year. And we can't let this one creep by without a review because not only is it true to Lovecraft's nightmarish world, it also combines the best elements of a first-person shooter with the dynamics of a stealth-oriented action/adventure title.

The year is 1922. Assuming the role of detective Jack Walters, a man who just spent six years in Arkham Asylum, you travel to the decrepit port of Innsmouth to investigate a simple robbery. But the town's equally decrepit inhabitants are hiding a secret that could cost you your sanity, if not your life.

Collecting weapons while sinking through sewers and refineries, being chased across rooftops by murderous fishermen, and evading piles of corrosive shoggoth goop makes for exciting action. A superbly eerie soundtrack, an enhanced AI system that keeps you guessing as to your enemies' true intentions, plus game play that encourages both fighting and stealth further enhance this sanity-sapping descent into Lovecraftian madness. Aside from some dated graphics (reportedly five years in the making), the game deeply immerses players into the Cthulhu myths.

But you best beware. It's tough to play — expect to die over and over again at first — and tougher to finish, but the final payoff is worth it. *lei lei Cthulhu Fhtagn!*



ARKHAM HORROR

Fantasy Flight Games
Adults Only

The streets of Arkham, Massachusetts, are teeming with indescribable monsters in this updated version of a game originally released in 1987 by Chaosium (RM50). To fight back, one to eight players take on the role of investigators trying to stop a reawakened Old One from taking over the world.

If you've got three or four hours to kill and a large space to play, then crack open the giant box crammed with well-crafted gaming pieces and a huge board. This is about as close as board games get to RPGs, which means the 24-page rulebook is full of details and subtleties that may elude even the most seasoned players.

It's great having a game where all the players team up to beat a common foe, but by shoggoth, more time is spent setting up, shuffling cards, consulting the rules and managing all of the various tokens than actually playing!



PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG

Ubisoft
PS2, Xbox 360, PSP, PC, Nintendo DS, GameCube

Games based on movies rarely live up to expectations, and this one, which is available on every platform except the Commodore 64, is no exception. Tackling the same storyline as in the movie, players alternate from first-person mode as stranded screenwriter Jack Driscoll (voiced by Adrian Brody) running through the jungle blowing away giant bugs, to the third-person perspective of Kong when it's time to snap the jaws of a T-Rex. Both roles are relatively satisfying because the hazy jungle of Skull Island and the concrete jungle of New York City are decently rendered.

The scares are few and far between, the story's a little too predictable, and there are glitches, but it's worth playing, especially for the original cast voices, an entirely original orchestral score, and the valiant roaring bellows of an ape that must have Donkey Kong sitting bananas.

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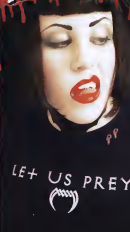
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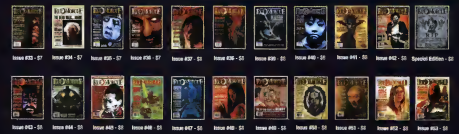
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THE MYSTERY OF THE WAX MUSEUM



USA - 1979

Directed by Michael Curtiz
Warner Brothers

Director Michael Curtiz will always be most remembered for making *Casablanca*, but years before casting the mould for the love story, he cast another one in the horror genre when he made *The Mystery of the Wax Museum*. The 1933 film is a wild pastiche of expressionistic horror, '30s newspaper comedy and, naturally, mystery, with a touch of tepid romance tossed in. But more importantly, it was, in historian William Everson's phrase, "the first really 'modern' horror film" — the movie that transported horror cinema out of Gothic moors and old dark houses, and into bustling, then-modern Manhattan.

Curtiz cranked out dozens of films as a Warner Brothers contract employee, among them two of the first colour horror films: *Doctor X* (1932) and *The Mystery of the Wax Museum* (1933). Both starred horror icons Lionel Atwill (*The Vampire Bat*, *Mark of the Vampire*) and Fay Wray (*The Vampire Bat*, *Mark of the Vampire*) and both were photographed in two-strip Technicolor. With its saturated but slightly muted blues and oranges, this primitive dye transfer colour process imbued the films with a gauzy, unreal beauty.

Mystery, which was lost for decades until its rediscovery in the '60s, is based on an incredibly obscure play by Charles Belden, which is a wild variation on *The Phantom of the Opera*. Master sculptor Ivan Igor (Atwill) is seemingly killed when his conniving partner razes their London wax museum for the insurance money. Twelve years later though, Igor resurfaces in Manhattan, covertly restocking his new museum with ersatz figures made from corpses cloaked in wax. Inadvertently, Igor meets the living double (Wray) of his long-since melted, beloved Marie Antoinette figure.

Clicking in at less than 80 minutes and check-

a-block with plots and subplots, this fiercely economical thriller rapidly escalates to its climax, with Wray battering away Igor's false visage, revealing his horribly burned face, and doing what she did best: scream like a diva. This denouement, the unmasking of a disfigured madman, became a genre staple, thanks to early horrors like this, *Phantom of the Opera* (1943), and later *Mr. Sardonius* (1961) and *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* (1971).

Vying with the film's leads as its greatest asset is art director Anton Grot's exquisite production design. *Mystery*'s titular wax museum is a minor marvel of stylization, from its art deco marquees, through to its expressionistic inner corridors, and into Atwill's cavernous, modernist steel laboratory. This lab's centrepiece is one of *Mystery*'s lasting gifts to horror cinema: an industrial-size vat of bubbling molten wax — a set piece recycled endlessly (though the substances it contains vary) throughout the genre.

The film also inaugurated a beloved, seemingly deathless film cycle: the corpse-encased-in-wax film. This wonderfully absurd horror convention appears variously in — among a slew of titles — *Mystery*'s excellent 3-D remake *House of Wax* (1953; *RM47*), the arcane Mexican wrestling adventure *Santo in the Wax Museum* (1963); *Cauldron of Blood* (1967), one of Boris Karloff's final films; the pitiful *Nightmare in Wax* (1969); the fun matinee cheapie *Terror in the Wax Museum* (1973); *Waxwork* (1988), its sequel *Waxwork II: Lost in Time* (1992) and most recently, the 2005 *House of Wax*, a remake of the remake.

Endlessly initiated as it may be, *Mystery* remains a marvelous, stylized time capsule, complete with bantering reporters, and some pro-Production Code rawness that may surprise modern viewers unfamiliar with the sheer brutality that runs through Warner Brothers' early sound-era films. Each of Hollywood's major studios had a stock filmmaking style, and Warner claimed out vicious crime sagas. In *Mystery*, for instance, Atwill keeps his junkie assistant in thrall by keeping him in smack, and later, cops hack away at the junkie's nerves to secure a confession. A far better illustration is the scene where morgue-robber Atwill takes a long peek at an obscured but nonetheless very nude corpse. Once the Code came along, this breed of horror vanished for decades, but *Mystery of the Wax Museum* remains one of the best examples of the genre breaking new ground.

Justin Humphreys



The Mystery of the Wax Museum: The original corpse-encased-in-wax movie.

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